YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

THE THREE BRIDES

Charlotte Yonge

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Yonge C.

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Содержание

Charlotte M. Yonge
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CHAPTER I
The Model And Her Copies

There is sure another Flood toward, that so many couples are coming to the Ark.
—As You Like It

"Ah! it is a pitiable case!"

"What case, boys?"

"Yours, mother, with such an influx of daughters-in-law."

"I suspect the daughters-in-law think themselves more to be pitied."

"As too many suns in one sphere."

"As daughters-in-law at all."

"There's a ready cure for that. Eh, Charlie?"

"The sight of the mother-in-law."

"Safe up on the shelf? Ha, you flattering boys!"

"Well, each of the three bridegrooms has severally told us that his bride was a strong likeness of the mother, so she will have the advantage of three mirrors!"

"Ay, and each married solely for her benefit. I wonder which is the truest!"

"Come, Baby Charles, don't *you* take to being cynical and satirical," said the mother. "It would be more to the purpose to consider of the bringing them home. Let me see, Raymond and his Cecil will be at Holford's Gate at 5.30. They must have the carriage in full state. I suppose Brewer knows."

"Trust the ringers for scenting it out."

"Julius and Rosamond by the down train at Willansborough, at 4.50. One of you must drive old Snapdragon in the van for them. They will not mind when they understand; but there's that poor wife of Miles's, I wish she could have come a few days earlier. Her friend, Mrs. Johnson, is to drop her by the express at Backsworth, at 3.30."

"Inconvenient woman!"

"I imagine that she cannot help it; Mrs. Johnson is going far north, and was very good in staying with her at Southampton till she could move. Poor little thing! alone in a strange country! I'll tell you what! One of you must run down by train, meet her, and either bring her home in a fly, or wait to be picked up by Raymond's train. Take her Miles's letter."

The two young men glanced at one another in dismay, and the elder said, "Wouldn't nurse do better?"

"No, no, Frank," said the younger, catching a distressed look on their mother's face, "I'll look up Miles's little African. I've rather a curiosity that way. Only don't let them start the bells under the impression that we are a pair of the victims. If so, I shall bolt."

"Julius must be the nearest bolting," said Frank. "How he accomplished it passes my comprehension. I shall not believe in it till I see him. There, then, I'll give orders. Barouche for the squire, van for the rector, and the rattling fly for the sailor's wife. So wags the course of human life," chanted Frank Charnock, as he strolled out of the room.

"Thanks, Charlie," whispered his mother. "I am grieved for that poor young thing. I wish I could go myself. And, Charlie, would you cast an eye round, and see how things look in their rooms? You have always been my daughter."

"Ah! my vocation is gone! Three in one day! I wonder which is the best of the lot. I bet upon Miles's Cape Gooseberry.—Tired, mother darling? Shall I send in nurse? I must be off, if I am to catch the 12.30 train."

He bent to kiss the face, which was too delicately shaped and tinted to look old enough to be in expectation of three daughters-in-law. No, prostrate as she was upon pillows, Mrs. Charnock Poynsett did not look as if she had attained fifty years. She was lady of Compton Poynsett in her own right; and had been so early married and widowed, as to have been the most efficient parental influence her five sons had ever known; and their beautiful young mother had been the object of their adoration from the nursery upwards, so that she laughed at people who talked of the trouble and anxiety of rearing sons.

They had all taken their cue from their senior, who had always been more to his mother than all the world besides. For several years, he being as old of his age as she was young, Mr. and Mrs. Charnock Poynsett, with scarcely eighteen years between their ages, had often been taken by strangers for husband and wife rather than son and mother. And though she knew she ought to wish for his marriage, she could not but be secretly relieved that there were no symptoms of any such went impending.

At last, during the first spring after Raymond Charnock Poynsett, Esquire, had been elected member for the little borough of Willansborough, his mother, while riding with her two youngest boys, met with an accident so severe, that in two years she had never quitted the morning-room, whither she had at first been carried. She was daily lifted to a couch, but she could endure no further motion, though her general health had become good, and her cheerfulness made her room pleasant to her sons when the rest of the house was very dreary to them.

Raymond, always the home son, would never have absented himself but for his parliamentary duties, and vibrated between London and home, until, when his mother had settled into a condition that seemed likely to be permanent, and his two youngest brothers were at home, reading each for his examination, the one for a Government clerkship, the other for the army, he yielded to the general recommendation, and set out for a journey on the Continent.

A few weeks later came the electrifying news of his engagement to his second cousin, Cecil Charnock. It was precisely the most obvious and suitable of connections. She was the only child of the head of the family of which his father had been a cadet, and there were complications of inheritance thus happily disposed of. Mrs. Poynsett had not seen her since her earliest childhood; but she was known to have been educated with elaborate care, and had been taken to the Continent as the completion of her education, and there Raymond had met her, and sped so rapidly with his wooing, that he had been married at Venice just four weeks previously.

Somewhat less recent was the wedding of the second son Commander Miles Charnock. (The younger sons bore their patronymic alone.) His ship had been stationed at the Cape and there, on a hunting expedition up the country, he had been detained by a severe illness at a settler's house; and this had resulted in his marrying the eldest daughter, Anne Fraser. She had spent some months at Simon's Bay while his ship was there, and when he found himself under orders for the eastern coast of Africa, she would fain have awaited him at Glen Fraser; but he preferred sending her home to fulfil the mission of daughterhood to his own mother.

The passage had been long and unfavourable, and the consequences to her had been so serious that when she landed she could not travel until after a few days' rest.

The marriage of the third son had been a much greater surprise. Compton Poynsett was not a family living; but the patron, hearing of Julius Charnock as a hard-working curate in a distant seaport, wrote to offer it to him; and the same letter to Mrs. Poynsett to offer it to him; and the same letter to Mrs Poynsett which conveyed this gratifying intelligence, also informed her of his having proposed to the daughter of the commanding officer of the regiment stationed at the town where lay his present charge. Her father enjoyed the barren honours of the Earldom of Rathforlane, an unimprovable estate

in a remote corner of Ireland, burthened with successive families of numerous daughters, so that he was forced to continue in the service, and the marriage had been hastened by the embarkation of the regiment for India only two days later. The Rectory had, however, been found in such a state of dilapidation, that demolition was the only cure; and thus the Reverend Julius and Lady Rosamond Charnock were to begin their married life in the family home.

The two youngest sons, Francis and Charles, stood on the other side of a gap made by the loss of two infants, and were only twenty-one and nineteen. Frank had passed through Oxford with credit, and had been promised a Government office; while Charles was intended for the army; and both had been reading with a tutor who lived at Willansborough, and was continually employed in cramming, being reported of as the best 'coach' in the country. Charlie, however, had passed a week previously, and was to repair to Sandhurst in another fortnight.

At half-past four there was a light tap at Mrs. Poynsett's door, and Charlie announced, "Here's the first, mother!" as he brought in a gray-cloaked figure; and Mrs. Poynsett took a trembling hand, and bestowed a kiss on a cheek which had languor and exhaustion in the very touch.

"She was tired to death, mother," said Charlie, "so we did not wait for the train."

"Quite right!" and as the newcomer sank into the chair he offered—"My dear, you are sadly knocked up! You were hardly fit to come."

"Thank you, I am quite well," answered the fagged timid voice.

"Hark!" as the crash of a peal of bells came up. "Dear child, you will like to rest before any fresh introductions. You shall go to your room and have some tea there."

"Thank you."

"Charlie, call Susan.—She is my boys' old nurse, now mine. Only tell me you have good accounts from my boy Miles."

"Oh yes;" and the hand tightly clasped the closely-written letter for which the mother's eyes felt hungry. "He sent you his love, and he will write to you next time. He was so busy, his first lieutenant was down in fever."

"Where was he?"

"Off Zanzibar—otherwise the crew was healthy—the 12th of August," she answered, squeezing out the sentences as if constrained by the mother's anxious gaze.

"And he was quite well when you parted with him?"

"Quite."

"Ah! you nursed my boy, and we must nurse you for him."

"Thank you, I am quite well." But she bit her lip, and spoke constrainedly, as if too shy and reserved to give way to the rush of emotion; but the coldness pained Mrs. Poynsett, whose expansiveness was easily checked; and a brief silence was followed by Charlie's return to report that he could not find nurse, and thought she was out with the other servants, watching for the arrival; in another moment, the approaching cheers caused him to rush out; and after many more noises, showing the excitement of the multitude and the advance of the bridal pair, during which Mrs. Poynsett lay with deepening colour and clasped hands, her nostrils dilating with anxiety and suppressed eagerness, there entered a tall, dark, sunburnt man bringing on his arm a little, trim, upright, girlish figure; and bending down, he exclaimed, "There, mother, I've brought her—here's your daughter!"

Two little gloved hands were put into hers, and a kiss exchanged, while Raymond anxiously inquired for his mother's health; and she broke in by saying, "And here is Anne—Miles's Anne, just arrived."

"Ah, I did not see you in the dark," said Raymond. "There, Cecil, is a sister for you—you never had one."

Cecil was readier with greeting hand and cheek than was Anne, but at the same moment the tea equipage was brought in, and Cecil, quite naturally, and as a matter of course, began to preside over the low table, while Raymond took his accustomed chair on the further side of his mother's sofa,

where he could lean over the arm and study her countenance, while she fondled the hand that he had hung over the back. He was describing the welcome at the station, and all through the village—the triumphal arches and shouts.

"But how they *did* miss you, mother," said Charlie. "Old Gurnet wrung my hand in tears as he said, 'Yes, sir, 'tis very fine, but it beats the heart out of it that madam bain't here to see.'"

"Good old Gurnet!" responded Raymond. "They are famously loyal. The J. C. P. crowned all above all the Cs and Rs, I was happy to see."

"J. was for Julius—not Julia," said the mother.

"No; J. H. C. and R. C. had a separate device of roses all to themselves. Hark! is that a cheer beginning again? Had we not better go into the drawing-room, mother? it will be so many for you all together."

"Oh no, I must see you all."

The brothers hurried out with their welcome; and in another minute, a plump soft cheek was pressed to the mother's, devouring kisses were hailed on her, and a fuller sweeter tone than had yet been heard answered the welcome.

"Thank you. So kind! Here's Julius! I'll not be in your way."

"Dearest mother, how is it with you?" as her son embraced her. "Rose has been longing to be with you."

"And we've all come together! How delicious!" cried Rosamond, enfolding Anne in her embrace; "I didn't know you were come!—See, Julius!"

But as Julius turned, a startled look came over Anne's face; and she turned so white, that Rosamond exclaimed, "My dear—what—she's faint!" And while Cecil stood looking puzzled, Rosamond had her arm round the trembling form, and disappeared with her, guided and assisted by Nurse Susan.

"Isn't she—?" exclaimed Julius, in a voice of triumph that made all smile.

"Full of sweet kindness," said Mrs. Poynsett; "but I have only seen and heard her yet, my dear Julius. Susan will take her to her room—my old one."

"Oh, thank you, mother," said Julius, "but I hardly like that; it seems like your giving it up."

"On the contrary, it proves that I do not give it up, since I put in temporary lodgers like you.—Now Cecil is housed as you preferred, Raymond—in the wainscot-rooms."

"And where have you put that poor Mrs. Miles?" asked Raymond. "She looks quite knocked up."

"Yes, she has been very ill on the voyage, and waited at Southampton to gather strength for the journey.—I am so grateful to your good Rose, Julius.—Why, where is the boy? Vanished in her wake, I declare!"

"His venerable head is quite turned," said Frank. "I had to get inside alone, and let them drive home outside together to avoid separation."

Raymond repeated his question as to the quarters of Miles's wife.

"I had the old schoolroom and the bedroom adjoining newly fitted up," answered Mrs. Poynsett. "Jenny Bowater was here yesterday, and gave the finishing touches. She tells me the rooms look very nice.—Cecil, my dear, you must excuse deficiencies; I shall look to you in future."

"I hope to manage well," said Cecil. "Had I not better go up now? Will you show me the way, Raymond?"

The mother and her two younger sons remained.

"Haven't I brought you home a splendid article?" was Frank's exclamation. "Julius has got the best of it."

"I back my Cape Gooseberry," returned Charles. "She has eyes and hair and skin that my Lady can't match, and is a fine figure of a woman besides."

"Much you know of Rosamond's eyes!"

"Or you either, boxed up in the van."

"Any way, they have made roast meat of his Reverence's heart! The other two take it much more easily."

"She's a mere chicken," said Charlie. "Who would have thought of Raymond being caught by a callow nestling?"

"And so uncommonly cool," added Frank.

"It would take much to transform Raymond," interposed the mother. "Now, boys, away with you; I must have a little quiet, to repair myself for company after dinner."

Charlie settled her cushions with womanly skill, and followed his brother. "Well, Frank, which is the White Cat? Ah, I thought so—she's yet to come."

"Not one is fit to hold a candle to *her*. You saw that as plain as I did, Charlie; Eleonora beats them all."

"Ah, you're not the youngest brother, remember. It was he who brought her home at last. Come, you need not knock me down; I shall never see any one to surpass the mother, and I'll have no one till I do."

CHAPTER II
The Population of Compton Poynsett

He wanted a wife his braw hoose to keep,
But favour wi' wooin' was fashous to seek.

—Laird o' Cockpen

In the bright lamplight of the dining-table, the new population first fully beheld one another, and understood one another's looks.

There was much family resemblance between the five brothers. All were well-grown well-made men, strong and agile, the countenance pleasing, rather square of mould, eyebrows straight and thick, nose well cut and short, chin firm and resolute-looking, and the complexion very dark in Raymond, Frank, and the absent Miles. Frank's eyes were soft, brown, rather pensive, and absent in expression; but Raymond's were much deeper and darker, and had a steadfast gravity, that made him be viewed as formidable, especially as he had lost all the youthful glow of colouring that mantled in his brother's olive cheek; and he had a short, thick, curly brown beard, while Frank had only attained to a black moustache, that might almost have been drawn on his lip with charcoal.

Charlie was an exception—fair, blue-eyed, rosy, and with a soft feminine contour of visage, which had often drawn on him reproaches for not being really the daughter all his mother's friends desired for her.

And Julius, with the outlines of the others, was Albino, with transparent skin mantling with colour that contrasted with his snowy hair, eyebrows, and the lashes, veiling eyes of a curious coral hue, really not unpleasing under their thick white fringes, but most inconveniently short of sight, although capable of much work; in fact, he was a curiously perfect pink-and-white edition of his dark and bronzed brother the sailor.

The dark eyes came from the father's side; Cecil had them, and very observing orbs they seemed to be, travelling about from one face to another, and into every corner of the room, scrutinizing every picture or piece of plate, and trying to see into the conservatory, which had a glass door opening from one end of the room. She was the youngest of the brides, and her features and form seemed hardly developed, nor had she attained the air of a matron; her fashionable dress of crisp white worked muslin with blue trimmings, and blue ribbons in her brown hair, only gave her the air of a young girl at her first party, in spite of her freedom from all shyness as she sat at the head of the table in contented self-possession, her little slender figure as upright as a perfect spine could make it.

Very different was the bride on Raymond's right hand. She was of middle height, soft, round, and plump, carrying her head a little tenderly on one side with a delightful *dégagée* kind of ease, and air of vivacious indolence. Her complexion was creamy and colourless, her nose rather *retroussé*, her lips full and parting in a delicious roguish smile, answering to the sleepily twinkling eyes, whose irides seemed to shade so imperceptibly into the palest gray, that there was no telling where the pupils ended, especially as the lids were habitually half closed, as if weighed down by the black length of their borders. The habit of arching up one or other of the eyebrows, in surprise or interrogation, gave a drollery to the otherwise nonchalant sweetness of the countenance. The mass of raven black hair was only adorned by a crimson ribbon, beneath which it had been thrust into a net, with a long thing that had once been a curl on the shoulder of the white tumbled bodice worn over a gray skirt which looked as if it had done solitary duty for the five weeks since the marriage, and was but slightly relieved by a crimson sash.

Rosamond made some apology when she saw Cecil's dainty equipment. "Dressed, you correct little thing! You put me to shame; but I had no notion which box my evening things are in, and it would have been serious to irritate the whole concern."

"And she was some time with Anne," added Julius.

"Ah! with my good will Anne should not have been here!" rejoined Rosamond. "Didn't I meet old Mrs. Nurse at your threshold, with an invitation from Mrs. Poynsett to dine with her in her room, and didn't we find the bird flown at the first stroke of the gong?"

"Oh, I am very well!" repeated Anne.

Yet she was far more colourless than Julius, for her complexion was not only faded by sickness, but was naturally of the whitest blonde tint; the simple coils of her hair "lint white," and her eyes of the lightest tint of pure blue. The features were of Scottish type, all the more so from being exaggerated by recent illness; but they were handsome enough to show that she must have been a bonnie lassie when her good looks were unimpaired. Her figure far surpassed in height that of both the other ladies, and was very slender, bending with languor and fatigue in spite of her strenuous attempts to straighten it. She was clad in a perfectly plain, almost quaker-looking light dove-coloured silk dress, fitting closely, and unrelieved by any ribbon or ornament of any description, so that her whole appearance suggested nothing but the words "washed out."

It was clear that to let her alone was merciful, and there was no lack of mutual communications among the rest. Frank and Charlie gave their account of the condition of the game.

"Do you let your tenants shoot rabbits?" exclaimed Cecil, as if scandalized. "We never do at Dunstone."

"It prevents an immense amount of discontent and ill-will and underhand work," said Raymond.

"My father never will listen to any nonsense about rabbits," proceeded Cecil. "If you once begin there is no end to it, they are sure to encroach. He just sends them a basket of game at the beginning and end of the season."

"By the bye," said Raymond, "I hope ours have all been sent out as usual."

"I can answer for a splendid one at our wedding breakfast," said Rosamond. "The mess-man who came to help was lost in admiration. Did you breakfast on ortolans, Cecil?"

"Or on nightingales' tongues?" added Charlie.

"You might as well say fatted dormice and snails," said Frank. "One would think the event had been eighteen hundred years ago."

"Poor Frank! he's stuffed so hard that it is bursting out at all his pores!" exclaimed Charlie.

"Ah! you have the advantage of your elder, Master Charles!" said Raymond, with a paternal sound of approbation.

"Till next time," said Frank. "Now, thank goodness, mine is once for all!"

The conversation drifted away to Venice and the homeward journey, which Raymond and Cecil seemed to have spent in unremitting sight-seeing. The quantities of mountains, cathedrals, and pictures they had inspected was quite appalling.

"How hard you must have worked!" exclaimed Rosamond. "Had you never a day's rest out of the thirty?"

"Had we, Cecil? I believe not," said Raymond.

"Sundays?" gasped Anne's low voice at his elbow.

"Indeed," triumphantly returned Cecil, "between English service and High Mass, and Benediction, and the public gardens, and listening to the band, we had not a single blank Sunday."

Anne started and looked aghast; and Raymond said, "The opportunity was not to be wasted, and Cecil enjoyed everything with unwearied vigour."

"Why, what else should we have done? It would have been very dull and stupid to have stayed in together," said Cecil, with a world of innocent wonder in her eyes. Then turning to her neighbour, "Surely, Julius, you went about and saw things!"

"The sea at Filey Bridge, and the Church Congress at Leeds," he answered, smiling.

"Very shocking, is it not, Cecil?" said Rosamond, with mock gravity; "but he must be forgiven, for he was tired to death! I used to think, for my part, that lovers were a sort of mild lunatics, never to be troubled or trusted with any earthly thing; but that's one of the things modern times have changed! As he was to be going, all the clerical staff of St. Awdry's must needs have their holiday and leave him to do their work; indeed, one was sent off here. For six weeks I never saw him, except when he used to rush in to say he couldn't stay; and when at last we were safe in the coupé, he fairly went to sleep before we got to the first station.—Hush! you *know* you did! And no wonder, for he had been up two nights with some sort of infidel who was supposed to be dying. Then that first week at Filey, he used to bring out his poetry books as the proper sort of thing, and try to read them to me on the sands: but by the time he had got to the bottom of a page, I used to hear the words dragging out slower and slower—

Whereon the—lily—maid—of—Astolat
Lay—smiling—like—a—star-fish—fast—asleep."

Wherewith Rosamond dropped her head and closed her eyes; while the brothers shouted with mirth, except Frank, whose countenance was 'of one hurt on a vulnerable side.'

"Disrespect to Elaine? Eh, Frank?" said Charlie; "how many pegs has Julius gone down in your estimation?"

Frank would not commit himself, but he was evidently at the era of sensitiveness on the poetical side. Cecil spoke for him. "How very provoking! What did you do to him, Rosamond?"

"I kept off the sand-flies! I can't say but I was glad of a little rest, for I had been packing up for the whole family for ten days past, with interludes of rushing out into the town; for whatever we had not forgotten, the shops had not sent home! Oh! what a paradise of quiet it was under the rocks at Filey—wasn't it, Julius?"

"We will go there again next time we have a chance," said Julius, looking blissful.

"I would never go again to the same place," cried Cecil. "That's not the way to acquire new ideas."

"We are too old to acquire new ideas, my dear," drawled Rosamond, sleepily.

"What did you go to the Church Congress for!" asked Charlie.

"I hope Julius was awake by that time," said Frank.

"Not if we are to have all the new ideas tried on us," said Raymond, dryly.

"I went to a Congress once!" exclaimed Cecil.

"Indeed!" said her husband, surprised.

"Yes. We thought we ought to encourage them. It was the Congress of Sunday-school managers for our archdeaconry."

"Did you acquire any new ideas?" asked Frank; while Rosamond's very eyelashes seemed to curl with suppressed diversion.

"Oh yes. We explained our system of tickets, and the Arch-deacon said it was a very good one, and ought to be adopted everywhere."

This mode of acquisition of new ideas was quite too much for Julius and Charlie, who both exploded; but Frank retained composure enough to ask, "Did you explain it in person?"

"No. We made Mr. Venn."

"The schoolmaster?" said Julius.

"No. He is *our* clergyman, and he always does as *we* tell him; and *so* Dunstone is quite the model parish of the archdeaconry."

Julius could not help making an odd little bend of the head, half deferential, half satirical; and Raymond said, “Cecil, I believe it rests with you to make the move.” An ingenuous girlish blush mantled on her cheek as she looked towards Rosamond and moved.

The drawing-room adjoined the dining-room, and likewise had a glass door leading into the conservatory; but this, like the other windows, was concealed by the pale-blue damask curtains that descended from cornices gilded like the legs of the substantial chairs and sofas. There was, however, no lack of modern light cane and basket seats round the fire, and it looked cheery and comfortable.

Rosamond put an arm round Anne’s waist—“Poor tired dear, come and lie on the sofa.”

“Oh no, I couldn’t. The gentlemen will come in.”

“All brothers! What, will you only be satisfied with an easy-chair! A charming room, and a charming fire!”

“Not so nice as a library,” said Cecil, stabbing the fire with the poker as a sort of act of possession. “We always sit in the library at Dunstone. State rooms are horrid.”

“This only wants to be littered down,” said Rosamond. “That’s my first task in fresh quarters, banishing some things and upsetting the rest, and strewing our own about judiciously. There are the inevitable wax-flowers. I have regular blarney about their being so lovely, that it would just go to my heart to expose them to the boys.”

“You have always been on the move,” said Cecil, who was standing by the table examining the ornaments.

“You may say so! there are not many of Her Majesty’s garrisons that I have not had experience of, except my native country that I wasn’t born in. It was very mean of them never once to send us to Ireland.”

“Where were you born?” said Cecil, neither of the two catching at the bull which perhaps Rosamond had allowed to escape by way of trying them.

“At Plymouth. Dick and I were both born at Plymouth, and Maurice at Scutari; then we were in the West Indies; the next two were born all up and down in Jamaica and all the rest of the Islands —Tom and Terry—dear boys, I’ve got the charge of them now they are left at school. Three more are Canadians; and little Nora is the only Irish-born one amongst us.”

“I thought you said you had never been in Ireland.”

“Never quartered there, but on visits at Rathforlane,” said Rosamond. “Our ten years at home we have been up and down the world, till at last you see I’ve ended where I began—at Plymouth.”

“Oh, what a lovely Florentine mosaic!” exclaimed Cecil, who had taken but slight interest in this itinerary. “It is just like a weight at Dunstone.” Then opening a miniature-case, “Who is this —Mrs. Poynsett when she was young?”

“Most likely,” said Rosamond. “It is like her now, and very like Charlie.”

“Yes. Charles is quite unlike the family.”

“What family?” said Rosamond.

“The Charnocks, of course. Raymond is a perfect Charnock!”

“A vast advantage,” murmured Rosamond.

“Of course,” said Cecil, taking it quite seriously. “No one else could be the same thing to us. Papa said there was not a match in the whole world that could have gratified him so much.”

“How old are you, Cecil?” quoth Rosamond, with a ripple in her voice.

“Oh, his age was no matter. I don’t like young men. That’s not the drawback; no, it is that horrid Poynsett at the end of the name.”

“You see you had better have waived your objections to youth, and taken a younger son.”

“I couldn’t,” said this naive young person. “Besides, there is much more of a field for me here than at Dunstone since papa’s marriage.”

Whatever Rosamond had on the tip of her tongue was averted by the entrance of the three younger brothers. Julius seated himself beside her in the cushioned fireside corner; and Cecil asked where Raymond was.

"Just stepped in to see my mother," said Frank. "This room opens into hers. Will you come to them?"

"Not yet," said Cecil. "I want you to tell me about the neighbourhood."

"Just what I want," said Rosamond. "Whenever I ask, Julius always says there's Dr. Easterby."

Frank and Charlie burst out laughing.

"Dr. Easterby is one of the greatest men in the English Church," said Julius.

"Precisely! But what is the regiment at Backsworth?" and as Charlie named it, "Oh, what fun! That's where Laurie Cookson exchanged. He will be sure to send us cards for everything."

"At Dunstone we never used to go to garrison gaieties," said Cecil, gravely.

"Oh! I'm a military pariah," said Rosamond, hastily.

"Who are the land-owners?" continued Cecil. "There was a place I saw from the line, but Raymond didn't hear when I asked whose it was. Close to the station, I mean."

"That is Sirenwood," said Charles. "Sir Harry Vivian's. He is just come back there with his two daughters."

"I thought Emily Vivian was dead," said Julius. "You don't mean *that* women!"

"*That* woman?" laughed his wife. "What has she done to be a *that* woman?"

"Offended his Reverence," said Frank, in that sort of jocose tone which betrays annoyance.

"A heartless mischievous woman!" said Julius.

Rosamond cocked up her left eyebrow with an ineffably droll look, which encouraged Charlie to say, "Such fierceness can only be prompted by personal experience. Look out, Rosamond!"

"Come 'fess, Julius," said she, merrily. "'Fess and make it up."

"I—I have nothing to confess," said Julius, seriously.

"Hasn't he indeed?" said she, looking at the brothers.

"Oh! don't ask us," said Charlie. "His youthful indiscretions were over long before our eyes had risen above the horizon!"

"Do you mean that they have really come home to live here?" demanded Julius, with singular indifference to the personal insinuations.

"I am sorry it is so painful to you," said I Frank, somewhat ironically; "but Sir Harry thinks it right to return and end his days among his own people."

"Is he ill, then?"

"I can't gratify you so far," returned Frank; "he is a fine old fellow of sixty-five. Just what humbugging papers call a regular specimen of an old English gentleman," he added to Cecil.

"Humbugging indeed, I should hope," muttered Julius. "The old English gentleman has reason to complain!"

"There's the charity of the clergy!" exclaimed Frank. "No forgiveness for a man who has spent a little in his youth!"

"As an essential of the old English gentleman?" asked Julius.

"At any rate, the poor old fellow has been punished enough," said Charlie.

"But what is it? Tell me all about it," said Cecil. "I am sure my father would not wish me to associate with dissipated people."

"Ah! Cecil," said Rosamond. "You'll have to take refuge with the military, after all!"

"It is just this," said Charlie. "Sir Harry and his only son were always extravagant, one as bad as the other—weren't they, Julius? Phil Bowater told me all about it, and how Tom Vivian lost fifteen thousand pounds one Derby Day, and was found dead in his chambers the next morning, they said from an over-dose of chloroform for neuralgia. Then the estate was so dipped that Sir Harry had to give up the estate to his creditors, and live on an allowance abroad or at watering-places till now,

when he has managed to come home. That is to say, the house is really leased to Lady Tyrrell, and he is in a measure her guest—very queer it must be for him in his own house."

"Is Lady Tyrrell *that* woman?" asked Rosamond.

"I conclude so," said Charlie. "She was the eldest daughter, and married Lord Tyrrell, who died about two years ago. She has no children, so she has taken the family in charge, patches up Sir Harry's affairs with her jointure, and chaperons her sister."

"What is she like?"

"Ask Frank," said Charlie, slyly.

"No!" said Frank, with dignity. "I shall say no more, I only excite prejudice."

"You are right, Frank," said Julius, who had evidently recovered from the shock. "It is not fair to judge people now from what they were eleven years ago. They have had some terrible lessons, and may be much changed."

"Ay," said Frank; "and they have been living in an atmosphere congenial to you, at Rockpier, and are hand and glove with all the St. Chrysostom folk there. What do you say to that, Julius? I can tell you they are enchanted with your curate!"

"They are not in this parish."

"No, but they turn up here—the ladies, at least—at all the services at odd times that Bindon has begun with."

"Ah! by the bye, is Herbert Bowater come?"

"Yes, the whole family came over to his installation in Mrs. Hornblower's lodgings."

"I saw him this morning, poor old Herbs," added Frank, "looking uncommonly as if he felt himself in a strait waistcoat."

"What, are there two curates?" demanded Cecil, in a tone of reprobation.

Julius made a gesture of assent, with a certain humorous air of deprecation, which, however, was lost upon her.

"We never let Mr. Venn have one," continued Cecil, "except one winter when he was ill, and then not a young one. Papa says idle young clergymen are not to be encouraged."

"I am entirely of Mr. Charnock's opinion. But if I have exceeded the Dunstone standard, it was not willingly. Herbert Bowater is the son of some old friends of my mother's, who wanted to keep their son near home, and made it their request that I would give him a title."

"And the Bowaters are the great feature in the neighbourhood," added Frank. "Herbert tells me there are wonderful designs for entertaining the brides."

"What do they consist of?" asked Rosamond.

"All the component parts of a family," said Frank. "The eldest daughter is a sort of sheet-anchor to my mother, as well as her own. The eldest son is at home now. He is in the army."

"In the Light Dragoons?" asked Rosamond. "Oh! then I knew him at Edinburgh! A man with yellow whiskers, and the next thing to a stutter."

"I declare, Julius, she is as good as any army list," exclaimed Charlie.

"There's praise!" cried Frank. "The army list is his one book! What a piece of luck to have you to coach him up in it!"

"I dare say Rosamond can tell me lots of wrinkles for my outfit," said Charles.

"I should hope so, having rigged out Dick for the line, and Maurice for the artillery!"

Charlie came and leant on the mantel-shelf, and commenced a conversation *sotto voce* on the subject nearest his heart; while Cecil continued her catechism.

"Are the Bowaters intellectual?"

"Jenny is very well read," said Julius, "a very sensible person."

"Yes," said Frank; "she was the only person here that so much as tried to read Browning. But if Cecil wants intellect, she had better take to the Duncombes, the queerest firm I ever fell in with.

He makes the turf a regular profession, actually gets a livelihood out of his betting-book; and she is in the strong-minded line—woman's rights, and all the rest of it."

"We never had such people at Dunstone," said Cecil. "Papa always said that the evil of being in parliament was the having to be civil to everybody."

Just then Raymond came back with intelligence that his mother was about to go to bed, and to call his wife to wish her good night. All went in succession to do the same.

"My dear," she said to Anne, "I hoped you were in bed."

"I thought I would wait for family worship."

"I am afraid we don't have prayers at night, my dear. We must resume them in the morning, now Raymond and Julius are come."

Poor Anne looked all the whiter, and only mumbled out a few answers to the kind counsels lavished upon her. Mrs. Poynsett was left to think over her daughters-in-law.

Lady Rosamond did not occupy her much. There was evidently plenty of good strong love between her and her husband; and though her training might not have been the best for a clergyman's wife, there was substance enough in both to shake down together in time.

But it was Raymond who made her uneasy—Raymond, who ever since his father's death had been more than all her other sons to her. She had armed herself against the pang of not being first with him, and now she was full of vague anxiety at the sense that she still held her old position. Had he not sat all the evening in his own place by her sofa, as if it were the very kernel of home and of repose? And whenever a sense of duty prompted her to suggest fetching his wife, had he not lingered, and gone on talking? It was indeed of Cecil; but how would she have liked his father, at the honeymoon's end, to prefer talking of her to talking with her? "She has been most carefully brought up, and is very intelligent and industrious," said Raymond. His mother could not help wondering whether a Roman son might not thus have described a highly accomplished Greek slave, just brought home for his mother's use.

CHAPTER III
Parish Explorations

A cry more tuneable
Was never holla'd to, nor cheer'd with horn,
In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly:
Judge, when you hear.—But, soft; what nymphs are these?
Midsummer Night's Dream

It was quite true that Cecil Charnock Poynsett was a very intelligent industrious creature, very carefully brought up—nay, if possible, a little too much so. "A little wholesome neglect" had been lacking.

The only child of her parents who had lived to see a second birthday was sure to be the centre of solicitude. She had not been spoilt in the usual acceptation of the word, for she had no liberty, fewer indulgences and luxuries than many children, and never was permitted to be naughty; but then she was quite aware that each dainty or each pleasure was granted or withheld from a careful consideration of her welfare, and that nothing came by chance with her. And on her rare ebullitions of self-will, mamma, governess, nurse, nay even papa, were all in sorrowful commotion till their princess had been brought to a sense of the enormity of her fault.

She lost her mother at fourteen, but the same anxious training was carried on by her father; and after three years he married her mother's most intimate friend, avowedly that the perfect system might be continued. Cecil's gaieties as a come-out young lady were selected on the same judicious principles as her childish diversions; and if ever the Dunstone family favoured an entertainment not to their taste, it was after a debate on the need of condescension and good-nature. She had, however, never had a season in London—a place her father hated; but she was taken abroad as soon as she was deemed old enough thoroughly to appreciate what she was to see there; and in Switzerland her Cousin Raymond, who had at different times visited Dunstone, overtook the party, and ere long made his proposals. He was the very man to whom two or three centuries ago Mr. Charnock would have betrothed the heiress in her infancy; and Cecil had never liked any one so well, feeling that her destiny came to a proper culmination in bestowing her hand on the most eligible Charnock, an M.P., and just a step above her father in rank and influence.

Her step-mother was under orders to spend the winter in Italy and the wedding had therefore taken place in Venice, so that Cecil might finish her journey as a wife. She had been very happy and fully occupied; Raymond, being younger and stronger than her parents, was more competent to escort her to every height or depth to which she wished to go, hunted up information for her, and was her most obedient servant, only resisting any prolongation of the journey beyond the legitimate four weeks; nor indeed had Cecil been desirous of deferring her introduction to her new sphere.

There she stood, her hair and pretty Parisian winter dress arranged to perfection, contemplating with approval the sitting-room that had been appropriated to her, the October sunshine lighting up the many-tinted trees around the smooth-shaven dewy lawn, and a bright fire on the hearth, shelves and chiffoniers awaiting her property, and piles of parcels, suggestive of wedding presents, awaiting her hand. She was standing at the table, turning out her travelling-bag with the comfortable sensation that it was not to be immediately re-packed, and had just disinterred a whole library of note-books, when her husband opened the door. "I believe Jenkins is waiting for your appearance to bring in the urn, my dear."

"I'm coming; but surely there ought to be a bell or gong to assemble the family."

"It might disturb my mother. What sleep she gets is in the morning. I never go to her till eleven o'clock, unless I am going out for the day."

"And what will she want me to do for her?" asked Cecil, glancing at her empty shelves.

"A woman's tact will soon find out. All I wish is that she should be your first object."

It was a much larger *all* than could be realized by the son whose happiest moments had been spent in devotion to her, and who thought the motherless girl must rejoice doubly in such a mother.

"But I am free till eleven," said Cecil.

"Free always, I hope," he returned, with a shade of vexation. Therewith they descended the broad stairs into the panelled hall, where a great fire was blazing on the hearth, and Rosamond and the two young brothers were standing chatting merrily before it.

Julius, she said, had his primary sermon heavy on his mind, and had risen before day to attack it; and she sped away to summon him from Mrs. Poynsett's beautiful old dressing-room, where he sat writing amid all the old associations. Anne was discovered hanging over the dining-room fire, looking whiter and more exhausted than the night before, having indeed been the first to come down-stairs. She was rebuked for fatiguing herself, and again murmured something about family worship.

"We must begin to-morrow," said Raymond. "We have got a chaplain now."

Julius, however, on entering excused himself, saying that after Sunday he should be at Matins at nine o'clock; whereupon Anne looked at him in mute astonishment.

Raymond, feeling that he ought to cultivate the solitary sister-in-law, began asking about Miles; but unlike the typical colonist, she was very silent, and her replies were monosyllabic, till Rosamond created a diversion by talking to Frank; and then Raymond elicited that Glen Fraser was far up the country—King Williamstown nearer than any other town. They had sent thither for a doctor for Miles, and he stayed one night, but said that mother's treatment was quite right; and as it was thirty miles off he did not come again. Thirty miles! what sort of roads? Not bad for wagons. It only took two days to get there if the river was not in flood. Had she not been married there? Yes, they all rode in thither for the purpose. Was it the nearest church, then? There was one only nine miles off, to which papa went when there was service—one Sunday in three, "for he is an Episcopalian, you know."

"And not your mother?" asked Cecil.

"I don't think she was at home," said Anne.

"Then had you a Presbyterian Kirk?" asked Cecil, remembering that in Scotland gentle blood and Anglicanism did not go together as uniformly as she believed them to do in England.

"There was one at Schneyder's Kloof, but that was Dutch."

"Then did you go nowhere?" asked Cecil.

"There was Mr. Pilgrim's."

"A clergyman?"

"No, a settler. He used to pray and expound every Sunday."

"What does he call himself?" said Cecil, growing more severe.

"I don't know," said Anne. "He gathers together a little flock of all denominations, who only care to hear the word."

"Such a voice in the wilderness as often does good service," said Julius, with a perception that the side with which he least agreed best deserved support.

He and Rosamond were bent on a tour of parochial inspection, as were Raymond and Cecil on a more domestic one, beginning with the gardens.

Cecil was the first lady down-stairs, all in claret colour trimmed with gray fur, with a little fur and velvet cap upon her head.

"There! it is a clear morning, and you can see the view," said Raymond, opening the hall door.

"Very prettily undulating ground," she said, standing on the steps, and looking over a somewhat rapid slope scattered with trees to the opposite side of the valley, where a park with a red mansion in the midst gleamed out among woods of green, red, orange, and brown tints. "How you are shut in! That great Spanish chestnut must be a perfect block when its leaves are out. My father would never let it stand so near the house."

"It is too near, but it was planted at the birth of my mother's brother."

"Who died?"

"Yes, at seven years old. It was her first grief."

"Then it would vex her if you cut it."

Raymond laughed. "It is hers, not mine."

"I forgot." There was a good deal in the tone; but she added, "What is that place opposite?"

"Sirenwood. It belongs to Sir Harry Vivian; but he does not live there."

"Yes, he does," said Cecil. "Your brothers say he has come back with his two daughters."

"There is only one unmarried."

"There is a widow come to keep house for him—Lady Tyrrell."

"Very likely," said Raymond; "my mother only writes with difficulty, so I hear little when I am from home."

"Is it true that they are horrid people, very dissipated, and not fit for me to associate with?"

"That is putting it strongly," said Raymond, quietly. "They are not likely to be very desirable acquaintances for you, but there is no reason you should not associate with them on ordinary terms of courtesy."

"Ah! I understand—as member's wife."

"I don't see what that has to do with it," said Raymond. "Ah! Rosamond!" as she came down in a Galway cloak over her black velveteen, "on the way to view your domain?"

"Yes, and yours," she said, nodding to Cecil. "You appreciate such English apple-pie order. It looks as if you never suffered a stray leaf to dance without an old woman to hunt it down. And what's that red house smiling across the valley?"

"Sirenwood," repeated Raymond; then to Julius he said, "Did you know it was inhabited again?"

"Frank said so," answered Julius, without further remark, giving his arm to his wife, who clasped both hands on it; while the other couple looked on as if doubtful whether this were a trying duty incumbent on them.

"What is it all about?" said Rosamond, as they walked down the avenue of walnuts leading to the iron gates in the opposite direction from Sirenwood. "Which of you was *that woman's* victim? Was it a sailor love of Miles's? I hope not! That poor little African might not stand a gay ghost cropping up again."

"Miles is far removed from the conventional sailor."

"Then it is reduced to the grave Raymond."

"I wish I had betrayed nothing."

"Now you may as well proceed to betray the rest, instead of leaving me to exercise my fancy."

"It is no secret, only such things are best not brought up again. Camilla Vivian was poor Raymond's *grande passion*, and you may imagine what a grief that was to my mother, especially as the poor brother was then living—one of the most fascinating, dangerous men I ever saw; and the whole tone of the place was ultra gay and thoughtless, the most reckless extravagance. However, he was set upon it, and my mother was forced to consent to the engagement. She seemed equally devoted to him, till she met Lord Tyrrell at some country house, and then a quarrel was picked, either by her mother or herself, about my mother retaining the headship of her own house. It was a palpable excuse, but it served to break the affair off, and Raymond was cruelly cut up. My mother made herself everything to him from that moment, gave up all her former habits to be with him, sent the little boys to school, and fairly dragged him through the trouble!"

"How long ago was it?"

"Ten years—yes, ten years. So far as ceasing to care a straw for a heartless woman like that, he has got over it, no doubt; but it has made a graver man of him for life, and I doubt whether, but for my mother's accident, he ever would have married."

"Did you marry for your mother's sake, Julius, or only tell her so?"

"For shame, my Lady Mischief!"

"And do you think the fair Camilla returned with plans that she finds disconcerted?"

"How can I tell? I have not seen her since I was a lad of eighteen.—Ah! how d'ye do, Betty?" in a tone of relief; "you've not seen my wife."

This was the first of a long series of introductions. Compton Poynsett was a straggling village, with the church, schools, and Rectory, ten minutes' walk from the park gates. It had not been neglected, so that Julius had not the doubtful satisfaction of coming like a missionary or reformer. The church, though not exactly as with his present lights he would have made it, was in respectable order, and contained hardly anything obnoxious to his taste; the schools were well built, properly officered, and the children under such discipline that Rosamond declared she could no more meddle with them than with her father's regiment.

The Rectory was at that moment level with the ground, and Julius explaining the plans, when up came the senior curate. Mr. Bindon, whom she, as well as Julius, greeted as an old friend, was the typical modern priest, full of his work, and caring for nothing besides, except a Swiss mountain once a year; a slight, spare, small, sallow man, but with an enormous power of untiring energy.

Scarcely had Rosamond shaken hands with him, standing where her drawing-room rug was to be in future days, when a merry whistle came near, and over the wall from the churchyard leapt first a black retriever, secondly a Skye terrier, thirdly a bull ditto, fourthly a young man, or rather an enormous boy, who for a moment stood amazed and disconcerted at the unexpectedly worshipful society into which he had jumped!

"Ha! Herbert! is that you?" laughed Julius.

"I beg your pardon!" he breathlessly exclaimed. "I was just taking the short cut! I had no idea —Here, Mungo, you ruffian!" as the Skye was investigating Lady Rosamond's boot.

"Oh, I like him of all things! I am glad to welcome you to our future house!" as she held out her hand to the Reverend Herbert Bowater, the junior curate, a deacon of a fortnight's standing, whose round open happy blue eyes, ruddy cheeks, merry lips, and curly light hair, did not seem in keeping with the rigidly straight collar and waistcoat, and the long black coat, at present plentifully streaked with green tree-moss, while his boots and trousers looked as if they had partaken of the mud-bath which his dogs had evidently been wallowing in.

"Off! off!" were his words, as he shook hands with his rectoress. "Get away, Rollo!" with an energetic shove of the foot to the big dog, who was about to shake his dripping coat for the ladies' special benefit. "I saw you arrive last evening," he said, in the conversational tone of a gentlemanly school-boy; "didn't you find it very cold?"

"Not very. I did not see you, though."

"He was organizing the cheers," said Mr. Bindon. "You shone in that, Bowater. They kept such good time."

"You were very good to cheer us at all," said Julius, "coming in the wake of the Squire as we did."

"The best of it was," said the junior, "that Charlie was so awfully afraid that he and poor Miles's wife would be taken for the Squire, that he dashed in on his way to warn me to choke them off. If she hadn't been ill, I must have set the boys on for a lark! How is she, though?" he asked in a really kind tone.

"She looks very ill, poor thing," said Julius.

Here the bull terrier became assiduous in his attentions to Rosamond; and between his master's calls and apologies, and her caresses and excuses, not much more was heard, till Julius asked with mock gravity, "And are these all you've brought over, Herbert?"

"Yes, all; I'd half a mind to bring the two greyhounds, but my father thought they would get into trouble in the preserves, and there isn't room at Mrs. Hornblower's place," he answered, with apologetic simplicity.

"What a pity Durham has been reduced!" said Mr. Bindon, dryly. "It would have been the right preferment for Bowater. The Bishop was obliged by statute to keep a pack of hounds."

"But, sir," expostulated the deacon, turning to the Rector, colouring all over his honest rosy face, "you don't object! You know, of course, I've given up sport," he added ruefully; "but only just as companions!—Ain't you, Rollo?" he added, almost with tears in his eyes, and a hand on the smooth black head, belonging to such a wise benignant face, that Rosamond was tempted to pronounce the dog the more clerical looking of the two.

"You are very welcome," said Julius, laughing, "provided you can manage with the old women's cats. I should find such companions rather awkward in pastoral visits."

"I'll teach them, sir! You may depend on it! We did have a little flare-up yesterday, but I showed them the sense of it. You might teach those dogs anything!—Ha! what then, Tartar! Halloo, Mungo! Rats, rats, rats!"

A prodigious scratching and snorting was audible in what had been a cellar of the quondam Rectory; and Rollo, becoming excited, dashed up to the scene of action, with a deep bass war-cry, while, to Rosamond's great amusement, "rats" was no less a peal to Rector and senior; and for the next quarter of an hour the three clergymen moved bricks, poked with their sticks, and cheered on the chase till the church clock struck one, the masons began to return from dinner, and the sounds of the bell at the Hall recalled the party to order.

"There, Rose! Our first day!" said Julius, aghast.

"You'd better come to lunch at my rooms," said the young curate, eagerly. "Do! Mother has brought the jolliest hamper! Game-pie, and preserved magnum-bonums, and pears off the old jargonelle.—Come, Lady Rosamond, do.—Come along, Bindon! There's such a dish of damson-cheese! Do!"

That "*do*," between insinuation and heartiness, was so boyish, that it was quite irresistible to the lady, who consented eagerly, while Julius wrote a word or two on a card, which he despatched to the Hall by the first child he encountered. In a few minutes they reached the nice clean bay-windowed room over the village shop, comically like an undergraduate's, in spite of the mother's and sister's recent touches.

There ensued a resolute quieting of the dogs, and a vigorous exertion of hospitality, necessitating some striding up and down stairs, and much shouting to Mrs. Hornblower and her little niece, who rejoiced in the peculiar name of Dilemma; while Rosamond petted Tartar upon her lap, and the two elder clergymen, each with an elbow against the window-frame and a knee on the seat, held council, based on the Rector's old knowledge of the territory and the curate's recent observations during his five weeks' sojourn.

The plans to be put in force next week were arranged during the meal, and the junior observed that he would walk home to-night and back on Saturday evening, since after that he should be tied pretty fast.

And he started with Julius and Rosamond on their further progress, soon, however, tumbling over another stone wall with all his dogs, and being only heard hallooing to them as they yelped after the larks.

"That is a delicious boy!" said Rosamond, laughing merrily. "A nice fellow—but we mustn't make it a custom to be always going in to partake of his hampers, or we shall prey inordinately on Mrs. Bowater's preserves."

"He was just like the hero of

"Oh, I have a plum-cake,
And a rare feast I'll make."

I do like a boy with a sweet tooth!"

"Like him! Of course I do. The Bowaters are like one's own kindred! I only hope I shall not spoil him."

"Hasn't his mother done that for you?"

"I wish he had spent a year or two at Cuddesdon! I ought to have seen him before consenting to give him a title at once, but his father and Jenny wished it so much. Ah! come in here. Bindon said Lucy Martin was a case for a lady."

Rosamond's hearty good-nature was much more at ease among ailing old women than prim school-children, and she gave great satisfaction in the cottages.

Julius did not of course come as a stranger, and had a general impression as to names and families; but he had been absent, except on short visits, for five years, so that Rosamond declared that this was a staple of his conversation: "Then it was Tom Deane—no, it was John Deane that married Blake's son—no, it was Blake's daughter that died who is living in the next house."

They finished with a long and miry lane, lying along the valley, and leading to the cottages of a little clan, the chief of whom seemed to be a large-boned lively-eyed old dame, who, after minute inquiries after "the Lady Poynsett," went on, "And be it true, Master Julius, as that young gentleman of Squire Bowater's is one of your passons?"

Julius admitted the fact.

"And be ye going to put he up in the pulpit to preach to we? 'Pon my word of honour, says I to Sally when her telled I, we shall have little Dick out of the infant-school next!"

"We're all young, Betty! Can't you put up with any one that is not older than yourself! I'm afraid he would hardly be able to get up the pulpit stair."

The Rector's reply delighted Betty; but she returned to the charge. "No, no, sir, I be coming to hear ye next Sunday. Sally have turned my black bonnet a purpose. It be one of the Lady Poynsett's, as her gave I when my old gentleman was took two years after the Squire—when bonnets was bonnets, you know, ma'am. Now tell me true, be ye to preach morning or arternoon, sir?"

"In the morning, I hope, Betty."

"Then I'll be there, Master Julius, to the third seat from the front; but it ain't becoming for a woman of my age, seventy-nine come Christmas, to sit under a slip of a lad as hasn't got the taste of the birch off his back."

"That's too bad, Betty," broke in Rosamond, speaking out of conviction. "Mr. Bowater isn't so young as he looks, and he was too good a boy ever to need the birch."

"All the wuss for he," retorted the undaunted Betty. "Spare the rod, and spile the child."

The village wit was left triumphant, and Julius proposed to return by a cross-road leading into the plantations. Suddenly a scud of rain mixed with whirling yellow leaves sent them hurrying into a cart-shed, where, with a sudden start, they found themselves rushing in on some one. Who was it?

A girl—a young lady. That was evident, as Rosamond panted out, "I beg your pardon!" and the next moment there was the exclamation, "Mr. Julius Charnock! You don't remember me? Eleonora Vivian!"

"Miss Vivian! you have the advantage of me," said Julius, a little stiffly. "Let me introduce my wife."

The hands met, and Rosamond perceived in the failing light a very fine-looking maiden, with a superbly carried head and neck, simply dressed in gray cloth. "Are you sheltering here, or are you sketching?" she asked, seeing some paper and drawing materials.

"I was giving a lesson. See," exhibiting some bold outlines on large paper. "Does not my pupil do me credit?"

"Very spirited," said Rosamond. "Where is she?"

"*He* is gone to fetch me his grandmother's umbrella. He is the little Gurth of these parts."

"Of whom you are making a Giotto?" asked Julius, thawing a little.

"Exactly; I found him drawing on a barn-door with such zeal and spirit, that I could not help offering him some lessons. Only see, does he not get on? I wish I could get him to the school of design."

"May I ask what becomes of his pigs?" demanded Julius.

"Don't you hear?" as sundry grunts and squeals of those eminently conversational animals were audible through the walls. "They are driven home to this rick-yard, so here I meet the boy."

"Who is he?" asked the Rector.

"I only know that he answers to the name of Joe. And here he comes," as a boy about ten years old came lumbering up in big boots, with a heavy plaid shawl on one arm, and an immense green umbrella in the other.

"Thank you, Joe. Make your bow to the lady and gentleman."

This was a pull of the flaxen forelock; for Joe was a slender, pretty, fair boy, of that delicately-complexioned English type which is not roughened till after many years of exposure.

"That's right, my man," said Julius, kindly. "What is your name?"

"Please, sir, Joshua Reynolds."

"Instinct," whispered Rosamond.

"Or influence of a name," returned Miss Vivian.

"Are you one of Dan Reynolds's boys, or Tim's?" proceeded "No, I bides with granny."

Julius made no further attempt at disentangling the pedigree but inquired about his employments. Did he go to school?

"When there ain't nothing to be done."

"And what can be done by such a mite?" asked Rosamond.

"Tell the lady," said the Rector; "what work can you do?"

"Bird-starving."

"Well!"

"And stoon-picking, and cow-herding, and odd jobs up at Farmer Light's; but they won't take I on for a carter-boy not yet 'cause I bean't not so lusty as some on 'em."

"Have you learnt to read?"

"Oh yes, very nicely," interposed Miss Vivian.

"Did you teach him?" said Rosamond.

"No! He could read well before I came to the place. I have only been at home six weeks, you know, and I did not know I was poaching on your manor," she added *sotto voce* to Julius, who could not but answer with warm thanks.

It was discovered that the rain had set in for the night, and an amicable contest ensued between the ladies as to shawl and umbrella, each declaring her dress unspoilable, till it ended in Eleonora having the shawl, and both agreeing to share the umbrella as far as the Sirenwood lodge.

However, the umbrella refused to open, and had to be given to the boy, who set his teeth into an extraordinary grin, and so dealt with the brazen gear as to expand a magnificent green vault, with a lesser leathern arctic zone round the pole; but when he had handed it to Miss Vivian, and she had linked her arm in Lady Rosamond's, it proved too mighty for her, tugged like a restive horse, and would fairly have run away with her, but for Rosamond's holding her fast.

"Lost!" they cried. "Two ladies carried away by an umbrella!"

"Here, Julius, no one can grapple with it but you," called Rosamond.

"I really think it's alive!" panted Eleonora, drawn up to her tip-toes before she could hand it to Julius, who, with both clinging to his arm, conducted them at last to the lodge, where Julius could only come in as far as it would let him, since it could neither be let down nor left to itself to fly to unknown regions.

A keeper with a more manageable article undertook to convey Miss Vivian home across the park; and with a pleasant farewell, husband and wife plodded their way home, along paths the mud of which could not be seen, only heard and felt; and when Rosamond, in the light of the hall, discovered the extent of the splashes, she had to leave Julius still contending with the umbrella; and when, in spite of the united efforts of the butler and footman, it still refused to come down, it was consigned to an empty coach-house, with orders that little Joe should have a shilling to bring it down and fetch it home in the morning!

CHAPTER IV
Shades In Sunshine

My friends would be angered,
My minnie be mad.

—Scots Song

"Whom do you think we met, mother?" said Julius, coming into her room, so soon as he had made his evening toilette, and finding there only his two younger brothers. "No other than Miss Vivian."

"Ah! then," broke in Charlie, "you saw what Jenkins calls the perfect picture of a woman."

"She is very handsome," soberly returned Julius. "Rose is quite delighted with her. Do you know anything of her?"

"Jenny Bowater was very fond of poor Emily," rejoined the mother. "I believe that she had a very good governess, but I wish she were in better hands now."

"I cannot think why there should be a universal prejudice for the sake of one early offence!" exclaimed Frank.

"Oh, indeed!" said Julius, amazed at such a tone to his mother.

"I only meant—mother, I beg your pardon—but you are only going by hearsay," answered Frank, in some confusion.

"Then you have not seen her?" said Julius.

"I! I'm the last person she is likely to seek, if you mean Camilla."

"She inquired a great deal after you, mother," interposed Frank, "and said she longed to call, only she did not know if you could see her. I do hope you will, when she calls on Cecil. I am sure you would think differently. Promise me, mother!"

"If she asks for me, I will, my boy," said Mrs. Poynsett, "but let me look! You aren't dressed for dinner! What will Mistress Cecil say to you! Ah! it is time you had ladies about the house again."

The two youths retreated; and Julius remained, looking anxiously and expressively at his mother.

"I am afraid so," she said; "but I had almost rather he were honestly smitten with the young one than that he believed in Camilla."

"I should think no one could long do that," said Julius.

"I don't know. He met them when he was nursing that poor young Scotsman at Rockpier, and got fascinated. He has never been quite the same since that time!" said the mother anxiously. "I don't blame him, poor fellow!" she added eagerly, "or mean that he has been a bit less satisfactory —oh no! Indeed, it may be my fault for expressing my objection too' plainly; he has always been reserved with me since, and I never lost the confidence of one of my boys before!"

That Julius knew full well, for he—as the next eldest at home—had been the recipient of all his mother's perplexities at the time of Raymond's courtship. Mrs. Poynsett had not been a woman of intimate female friends. Her sons had served the purpose, and this was perhaps one great element in her almost unbounded influence with them. Julius was deeply concerned to see her eyes glistening with tears as she spoke of the cloud that had risen between her and Frank.

"There is great hope that this younger one may be worthy," he said. "She has had a very different bringing up from her sister, and I did not tell you what I found her doing. She was teaching a little pig-herd boy to draw."

"Ah! I heard Lady Tyrrell was taking to the education of the people line."

"I want to know who the boy is," said Julius. "He called himself Reynolds, and said he lived with granny, but was not a son of Daniel's or Timothy's. He seemed about ten years old."

"Reynolds? Then I know who he must be. Don't you remember a pretty-looking girl we had in the nursery in Charlie's time? His 'Fan-fan' he used to call her."

"Ah, yes, I remember; she was a Reynolds, for both the little boys could be excited to fury if we assumed that she was a fox. You don't mean that she went wrong?"

"Not till after she had left us, and seemed to be doing well in another place; but unfortunately she was allowed to have a holiday in the race week, and a day at the course seems to have done the mischief. Susan can tell you all about it, if you want to know. She was as broken-hearted as if Fanny had been her own child—much more than the old mother herself, I fear."

"What has become of the girl?"

"Gone from bad to worse. Alas! I heard a report that she had been seen with some of the people who appear on the race-course with those gambling shooting-galleries, or something of that sort."

"Ah! those miserable races! They are the bane of the country. I wish no one would go near them."

"They are a very pleasant county gathering."

"To you, mother, and such as you; but you could have your county meeting without doing quite so much harm. If Raymond would only withdraw his subscription."

"It would be as much as his seat is worth! Those races are the one great event of Wil'sbro' and Backsworth, the harvest of all the tradespeople. Besides, you know what is said of their expedience as far as horses are concerned."

"I would sacrifice the breed of horses to prevent the evils," said Julius.

"*You* would, but—My boy, I suppose this is the right view for a clergyman, but it will never do to force it here. You will lose all influence if you are over-strained."

"Was St. Chrysostom over-strained about the hippodrome?" said Julius, thoughtfully.

Mrs. Poynsett looked at him as he leant upon the chimney-piece. Here was another son gone, in a different way, beyond her reach. She had seen comparatively little of him since his University days; and though always a good and conscientious person, there had been nothing to draw her out of secular modes of thought; nor had she any connection with the clerical world, so that she had not, as it were, gone along with the tone of mind that she had perceived in him.

He did not return to the subject, and they were soon joined by his elder brother. At the first opportunity after dinner, Frank got Rosamond up into a corner with a would-be indifferent "So you met Miss Vivian. What did you think of her?"

Rosamond's intuition saw what she was required to think, and being experienced in raving brothers, she praised the fine face and figure so as to find the way to his heart.

"I am so glad you met her in that way. Even Julius must be convinced. Was not he delighted?"

"I think she grew upon him."

"And now neither of you will be warped. It is so very strange in my mother, generally the kindest, most open-hearted woman in the world, to distrust and bear a grudge against them all for the son's dissipation—just as if that affected the ladies of a family!"

"I did not think it was entirely on his account," said Rosamond.

"Old stories of flirtation!" said Frank, scornfully; "but what are they to be cast up against a woman in her widowhood? It is so utterly unlike mother, I can't understand it."

"Would not the natural conclusion be that she knew more, and had her reasons?"

"I tell you, Rosamond, I know them infinitely better than she does. She never saw them since Lady Tyrrell's marriage, when Eleonora was a mere child; now I saw a great deal of them at Rockpier last year. There was poor Jamie Armstrong sent down to spend the winter on the south coast; and as none of his own people could be with him, we—his Oxford friends, I mean—took turns to come to him; and as I had just gone up for my degree, I had the most time. The Vivians had been living

there ever since they went on poor Emily's account. They did not like to leave the place where she died you see; and Lady Tyrrell had joined them after her husband's death. Such a pleasant house! no regular gaieties, of course, but a few friends in a quiet way—music and charades, and so forth. Every one knew everybody there; not a bit of our stiff county ways, but meeting all day long in the most sociable manner."

"Oh yes, I know the style of place."

"One gets better acquainted in a week than one does in seven years in a place like this," proceeded Frank. "And you may tell Julius to ask any of the clerics if Lenore was not a perfect darling with the Vicar and his wife, and her sister too; and Rockpier is a regular tip-top place for Church, you know. I'm sure it was enough to make a fellow good for life, just to see Eleonora walking up the aisle with that sweet face of hers, looking more like heaven than earth."

Rosamond made reply enough to set him off again. "Lady Tyrrell would have been content to stay there for ever, she told me, but she thought it too confined a range for Eleonora; there was no formation of character, though I don't see how it could have formed better; but Lady Tyrrell is a thoroughly careful motherly sister, and thought it right she should see a little of the world. So they broke up from Rockpier, and spent a year abroad; and now Lady Tyrrell is making great sacrifices to enable her father to come and live at home again. I must say it would be more neighbourly to welcome them a little more kindly!"

"I should think such agreeable people were sure to win their way."

"Ah! you don't know how impervious our style of old squire and squiress can be! If even mother is not superior to the old prejudice, who will be? And it is *very* hard on a fellow; for three parts of my time is taken up by this eternal cramming—I should have no heart for it but for her—and I can't be going over to Sirenwood as I used to go to Rockpier, while my mother vexes herself about it, in her state. If she were up and about I should not mind, or she would know better; but what can they—Lenore, I mean—think of me, but that I am as bad as the rest?"

"Do you mean that anything has passed between you?"

"No, not with Lenore. Her sister spoke to me, and said it was not right when she had seen nothing but Rockpier; but she as good as promised to stand my friend. And when I get to the office, in two years, I shall have quite enough to begin upon, with what my mother allows us."

"Then you hope she will wait for that?"

"I feel sure of it—that is, if she is not annoyed by this abominable usage from my family. Oh! Rosamond, you will help us when you get into your own house, and you will get Julius to see it in a proper light. Mother trusts to him almost as much as to Raymond; but it is our misfortune to be so much younger that she can't believe us grown up."

"O, Frank," said Charlie, coming in, "here's Price come up about the puppies.—What, Rosamond, has he got hold of you? What a blessing for me! but I pity you."

Frank and Charlie went off together; and Julius was in the act of begging Cecil to illuminate a notice of the services, to be framed and put into the church porch, when Raymond came in from the other room to make up a whist-table for his mother. Rosamond gladly responded; but there was a slight accent of contempt in Cecil's voice, as she replied, "I never played a game at cards in my life."

"They are a great resource to my mother," said Raymond. "Anne, you are too tired to play?—No, Julius, the pack is not there; look in the drawer of the chiffonier."

Julius handed the list he had been jotting down to Cecil, and followed his brother, with his hands full of cards, unconscious of the expression of dismay, almost horror, with which Anne was gazing after him.

"Oh! let us be resolute!" she cried, as soon as the door was shut. "Do not let us touch the evil thing!"

"Cards?" said Cecil. "If Mrs. Poynsett cannot be amused without them, I suppose we shall have to learn. I always heard she was such an intellectual woman."

"But we ought to resist sin, however painful it may be," said Anne, gathering strength; "nay, even if a minister sets the example of defection."

"You think it wicked," said Cecil. "Oh no, it is stupid and silly, and an absurd waste of time, but no more."

"Yes, it is," said Anne. "Cards are the bane of thousands."

"Oh yes, gambling and all that; but to play in the evening to amuse an invalid can have no harm in it."

"An invalid and aged woman ought to have her mind set upon better things," said Anne. "I shall not withdraw my testimony, and I hope you will not."

"I don't know," said Cecil. "You see I am expected to attend to Mrs. Poynsett; and I have seen whist at Dunstone when any dull old person came there. What a troublesome crooked hand Julius writes—just like Greek! What's all this? So many services—four on Sunday, two every day, three on Wednesdays and Fridays! We never had anything like this at Dunstone."

"It is very superstitious," said Anne.

"Very superfluous, I should say," amended Cecil. "I am sure my father would consent to nothing of the kind. I shall speak to Raymond about it."

"Yes," said Anne; "it does seem terrible that a minister should try to make up for worldly amusements by a quantity of vain ceremonies."

"I wish you would not call him a minister, it sounds like a dissenter."

"I think ministers their best name, except pastors."

"Both are horrid alike," said Cecil. "I shall teach all the people to call Julius the Rector. That's better than Mr. Charnock—what Raymond ought to be."

Anne was struck dumb at this fearful display of worldliness; and Cecil betook herself to the piano, but the moment her husband appeared she showed him the list.

"He has cut out plenty of work," said Raymond, "but three of them must want a field for their energies."

"It is preposterous. I want you to speak to him about it."

"You are not expected to go to them all," Raymond made answer.

"Then there's no sense in having them," responded Cecil. "Evening services are very bad for the people, bringing them out late. You ought to tell him so."

"He is Rector, and I am not," said Raymond.

"Mr. Venn did nothing without papa's consent," exclaimed

"My dear Cecil, don't let your loyalty make a Harry the Eighth of your father," said Raymond; "the clergyman ought to be a free agent."

"You don't approve?"

"I don't approve or disapprove. It is not a matter I know anything about."

"But I assure you it has been all thought over at Dunstone."

"Come, my mother wants to go to bed, and you are keeping her waiting."

Cecil was silenced for the moment, but not daunted; for was it not the foremost duty of the lady of the manor to keep the clergyman in order, more especially when he was her own husband's younger brother? so she met her brother-in-law with "Julius, when I undertook that notice, I had no notion you were going to have so many services."

"Is there more than you have time to paint? Then Bindon can do it, or Jenny Bowater."

"No! it is not time or trouble; but I do not think such a number of services desirable."

"Indeed!" said he, looking amused.

"Yes. An over number of services frequented by no one only brings the Church into contempt. I heard papa say so. We only had regular Sunday and Saint's Day services, and I am sure Dunstone was quite as religious a place as there is any need to be."

"I am glad to hear it," said Julius, an odd look flickering about his face; "but as I am afraid Compton is not as religious a place as there is need to be, I must try, by your leave, all means of making it so. Good night."

He was gone, and Cecil was not sure that he had not presumed to laugh at her.

CHAPTER V
A Sunday of Excitement

Strangers in court do take her for the queen.

—Shakespeare

The first Sunday of Julius Charnock's ministry was spent in an unexpected manner. In the darkness of the autumn morning there was a knock at the door, and a low hurried call in Anne's voice at the bedroom door: "Rosamond! Julius, pray look out! Isn't there a great fire somewhere?"

"Fire! Here?" cried Rosamond, springing up.

"No, not here. A great way off. You could beat it back."

Rosamond had by this time rushed to the window which looked out the wrong way, found her dressing-gown, and scrambled into it in the dark ere joining Anne in the gallery, from the end window of which the lurid light in the sky, with an occasional flame leaping up, was plainly visible. When Julius joined them he declared it to be at Willansborough, and set off to call up the coachman and despatch the fire-engine, his wife calling after him to send for the soldiers at Backsworth.

Frank and Charlie came rushing down in gratified excitement, declaring that it was tremendous —the church at least—and exulting in the attainment of their life-long ambition, the riding out on the fire-engine. Servants bustled about, exclaiming, tramping, or whisking on the stairs; and Raymond presently appeared to ask whether his mother were ill, and, when reassured on that score, hurrying to ascertain whether she were alarmed, before he started for the scene of action.

"Let me come and stay with her," said Rosamond, a striking figure, in a scarlet dressing-gown, with a thick plait of black hair hanging down to her waist on either side.

"Thank you, it will be very kind," said Raymond, running down before her, and meeting Susan waddling out in a fringe of curl-papers, for some mysterious instinct or echo had conveyed to her and her mistress that there was fire somewhere—perhaps at home. Mrs. Poynsett was not a nervous woman, and from the time she saw her eldest son come in, all fright was over, and she could have borne to hear that the house over her head was burning, in the perfect trust that he would save her from all peril; nor had he any difficulty in committing her to Rosamond, when he hurried away to finish dressing and repair to the spot.

Nothing could be seen from her room, but the little ante-room between it and the drawing-room had an excellent view, as the ground fell away from it, and there was an opening among the trees.

"We must get you there!" exclaimed Rosamond, in her excitement, helping her into some garments, and then running out as she heard a step—"Here, Julius, help me;" and without more ado, the mother was transported between them to the broad low couch under the window, and there bestowed in a nest of pillows, shawls, and rugs, that seemed to grow up under Rosamond's touch.

Then following Julius out into the hall as he met his brother, Rosamond clung to him, entreating, "Please, please don't run into any dangerous places."

"Never fear, dearest; I am not likely."

"Don't let him, pray!" she said, turning to Raymond. "Make him remember how blind he is."

"I'll take good care of him, Rosamond," said the elder brother kindly; "I'm used to it."

"And send for the –th," she added. "There is nothing like soldiers at a fire."

"The glare must have given notice," said Julius, "but we'll send if needful. Let go, you foolish girl; I'm not leading a forlorn hope."

Did Raymond, as he mounted his horse, turning from the contact of the white and black heads, admire the reasonableness of the Cecil who had never shown any fears for his safety, nor any tendency to run about the passages in her *robe de chambre*, though she was now dressing with all speed?

The women-folk had to depend on their own eyes for intelligence, for every male, not only of the household but of the village, between the ages of five and seventy, started for Wil'sbro', and a good many females followed their example, including the cook and her suite.

However, Susan remained, to find her mistress flown, and in her fright, give Lady Rosamond as round a scolding as if she had been Charlie, for her rashness in attempting a transit, which Dr. Hayter had pronounced to be as much as her mistress's life was worth. Having thus relieved her mind, and finding that Mrs. Poynsett was really very comfortable, or else too eager and anxious to find out if she was not, the good woman applied herself to the making of coffee.

Anne and Cecil had found their way to the leads, and were thence summoned to partake of this hasty meal, after which they proposed going to look from the brow of the hill; and Mrs. Poynsett insisted that Rosamond should not stay behind on her account; and, glad to appease the restlessness of anxiety, out went the ladies, to find the best view of the town,—usually a white object in the distance, but now blurred by smoke thick and black in the daylight, and now and then reddened by bursts of flame.

Anne had been reassured as to the need of beating out the fire and trampling down a place to isolate it, as in the bush-fires of her experience; and Rosamond related the achievements of the regiment in quenching many a conflagration in inflammable colonial cities.

It occurred to her that the best place whence to see it was the tower of the church, which, placed upon a little knoll, was standing out in full relief against the lurid light. She found the key at the sexton's, and led the way up the broken stone stair to the trap-door, where they emerged on the leads, and, in spite of the cold wind and furious flapping of the flag above their heads, stood absorbed in the interest of the sight.

There was a black mass in the open space, whence rose fitful clouds of smoke, the remnants of the fire, which had there done its worst; and beyond was a smoky undefined outline, with tongues of flame darting up, then volumes of dense white smoke, denoting a rush of water from the engines. Black beings flitted about like ants round a disturbed nest; Rosamond hoped she detected some scarlet among them, and Cecil lamented over not having brought her opera-glass. Even without this, it was possible to make out two long lines of men between the fire and the river, and at times they fancied they heard the shouting, but the wind generally carried it away. The cold was bitter, and they had to hold together and keep a tight grip upon their garments against the gusts that seemed to rock the tower; but they could not bear to turn away, though the clock beneath pealed out hour after hour; for still, as the flames were subdued in one place they broke out in another; but gradually smoke became predominant, and then grew thinner, and as some of the black specks began to straggle into the road as if returning to Compton, the desire to hear became more pressing than that to see, and the three ladies began to descend—a slow and weary process, cutting them off from the view, and lasting so long, that the road was no longer deserted when they finally emerged into the churchyard.

Young Mr. Bowater, grimed, dusty, hatless, and his hair on end, and Rollo following with his feathery tail singed, hurried up at once. "I'm not fit to touch, Lady Rosamond," as he showed a black hand, and bowed to the others.

"Where's Ju—where's my husband?" exclaimed Rosamond.

"Just behind, riding home with Raymond and the rest of them. Wasn't it a magnificent flare-up? But there was no loss of life; and this dog was of as much use as two men—carried whatever I told him."

"Good old man! You've suffered too!" said Rosamond. "Pah! you're like a singed horse; but never mind, you're a hero."

"And where is Mr. Charnock Poynsett?" said Cecil, retreating from the dog, which her sisters-in-law were vehemently patting.

"He was arranging with the mayor. Church, paper-mills, and town-hall got the worst of it. It was well he came down; old Briggs, the mayor, lost his head, and Fuller never had one. Every one gave contrary orders till he came down, and then, didn't we work!"

The curate stretched his stalwart limbs, as if they were becoming sensible of the strain they had undergone.

"Did you say the church was burnt?" asked Cecil.

"Yes; and a very good thing too! Hideous place, where you couldn't do right if you died for it! The fire began there—stoves no doubt—and there it would have stopped if any one had had any sense; but there they would run and gape, and the more I tried to get them to form a chain and drench the warehouses, the more they wouldn't do it. And when the flame once got hold of the paper—did you see it?—it was not a thing to forget. I verily believe the whole town would have gone if the Charnocks hadn't come and got a little discipline into the asses. It was just life and death work, fighting the fire to hinder it from getting across Water Lane, and then it would have been all up with High Street. The tongues broke out like live things ready to lick up everything; and it was like killing dragons to go at them with the hose and buckets. I declare my arms are fit to drop out of their sockets. And the Rector devoted himself to carrying out bed-ridden old women. I forgot to tell you, Lady Rosamond, he has broken his—There now, I never meant to frighten you—broken his spectacles."

"You did it on purpose," she said, laughing at her own start.

"No, indeed, I did not."

"And is it quite out now?"

"Yes; when the Backsworth engines and the soldiers came up, it was like the Prussians at Waterloo."

"Oh, then it was done," said Rosamond. "Take care! my grandfather was in the Light Division."

"And my uncle in the Guards," said the curate. But before the Waterloo controversy could be pursued, four or five figures on horseback came round the knoll, and Raymond and Julius sprang off their horses, introducing the three officers who followed their example.

One was Rosamond's old acquaintance, the Colonel, a friend of her father; but she had little attention to spare for them till she had surveyed her husband, who looked nothing worse than exceedingly dusty, and at fault without his spectacles.

Inquiries were made for Frank and Charlie. They were walking home. They had worked gallantly. The flames were extinguished, but the engines must go on playing on them for some time longer. No lives lost, and very few casualties, but the paper-mills were entirely destroyed, and about twenty tenements, so that great distress was to be apprehended.

Such intelligence was being communicated as the party stood together in a group, when there was a light tinkling of bells, and two ladies in a light open carriage, drawn by two spirited ponies, dashed round the knoll; and at the moment something must have gone wrong with them, for there was a start, a pull, a call of "Raymond! Raymond!"

Throwing his bridle to Herbert Bowater, he sprang to the horses' heads.

"Mr. Poynsett! Thank you! I beg your pardon," said the lady, recovering herself; and Rosamond instantly perceived that she must be Lady Tyrrell, for she was young-looking, very handsome, and in slight mourning; and her companion was Miss Vivian. Julius, holding his surviving glass to his eye, likewise stepped forward. "Thank you, it was so stupid," the lady ran on. "Is not there something wrong with the traces? I don't know how they got themselves harnessed, but there was no keeping at home."

"I think all is right," said Raymond, gravely, making the examination over to a servant. "Let me introduce my wife, Lady Tyrrell."

The lady held out her hand. “I hope we shall be excellent neighbours.—My sister.—You remember little Lena,” she added to the brothers. “She stole a march on us, I find. I heard of your encounter on Friday. It was too bad of you not to come in and let us send you home; I hope you did not get very wet, Lady Rosamond.—Ah! Mr. Strangeways, I did not know you were there,” she proceeded, as the youngest of the officers accosted her; “come over and see us. You’re better provided now; but come to luncheon any day. I am sure to be at home at half-past one; and I want so much to hear of your mother and sisters.” And with a universal bow and smile she nourished her whip, her ponies jangled their bells, and the ladies vanished.

“Stunning pair that!” was young Strangeways’ exclamation.

“Most beautiful!” murmured Cecil, in a low voice, as if she was quite dazzled. “You never said she was like that,” she added reproachfully to Julius.

“Our encounter was in the dark,” he answered.

“Oh, I did not mean the young one, but Lady Tyrrell. She is just like a gem we saw at Firenze —which was it?”

“Where?” said Raymond, bewildered.

“Firenze—Florence,” she said, deigning to translate; and finding her own reply. “Ah, yes, the Medusa!” then, as more than one exclaimed in indignant dismay, she said, “No, not the Gorgon, but the beautiful winged head, with only two serpents on the brow and one coiled round the neck, and the pensive melancholy face.”

“I know,” said Julius, shortly; while the other gentlemen entered into an argument, some defending the beauty of the younger sister, some of the elder; and it lasted till they entered the park, where all were glad to partake of their well-earned meal, most of the gentlemen having been at work since dawn without sustenance, except a pull at the beer served out to the firemen.

Cecil was not at all shy, and was pleased to take her place as representative lady of the house; but somehow, though every one was civil and attentive to her, she found herself effaced by the more full-blown Rosamond, accustomed to the same world as the guests; and she could not help feeling the same sense of depression as when she had to yield the head of her father’s table to her step-mother.

Nor could she have that going to church for the first time in state with her bridegroom she had professed to dread, but had really anticipated with complacency; for though Julius had bidden the bells to be rung for afternoon service, Raymond was obliged to go back to Wil’sbro’ to make arrangements for the burnt-out families, and she had to go as lonely as Anne herself.

Lady Tyrrell and her sister were both at Compton Church, and overtook the three sisters-in-law as they were waiting to be joined by the Rector.

“We shall have to take shelter with you,” said Lady Tyrrell, “poor burnt-out beings that we are.”

“Do you belong to Wil’sbro’?” said Rosamond.

“Yes; St. Nicholas is an immense straggling parish, going four miles along the river. I don’t know how we shall ever be able to go back again to poor old Mr. Fuller. You’ll never get rid of us from Compton.”

“I suppose they will set about rebuilding the church at once,” said Cecil. “Of course they will form a committee, and put my husband on it.”

“In the chair, no doubt,” said Lady Tyrrell, in a tone that sounded to Rosamond sarcastic, but which evidently gratified Cecil. “But we will have a committee of our own, and you will have to preside, and patronize our bazaar. Of course you know all about them.”

“Oh yes!” said Cecil, eagerly. “We have one every year for the Infirmary, only my father did not approve of my selling at a stall.”

“Ah! quite right then, but you are a married woman now, and that is quite a different thing. The stall of the three brides. What an attraction! I shall come and talk about it when I make my call in full form! Good-bye again.”

Cecil's balance was more than restored by this entire recognition to be prime lady-patroness of everything. To add to her satisfaction, when her husband came home to dinner, bringing with him both the curates, she found there was to be a meeting on Tuesday in the Assembly-room, of both sexes, to consider of the relief of the work-people, and that he would be glad to take her to it. Moreover, as it was to be strictly local, Rosamond was not needed there, though Raymond was not equally clear as to the Rector, since he believed that the St. Nicholas parishioners meant to ask the loan of Compton Poynsett Church for one service on a Sunday.

"Then I shall keep out of the way," said Julius. "I do not want to have the request made to me in public."

"You do not mean to refuse?" said Cecil, with a sort of self-identification with her constituents.

"The people are welcome to attend as many of our services as they like; but there is no hour that I could give the church up to Mr. Fuller on a Sunday."

"Nor would the use of St. Nicholas be very edifying for our people," added Mr. Bindon.

His junior clenched it by saying with a laugh, "I should think not! Fancy old Fuller's rusty black gown up in our pulpit!"

"I rejoice to say that is burnt," rejoined Mr. Bindon.

"What bet will you take that a new one will be the first thing subscribed for?" said the deacon, bringing a certain grave look on the faces of both the elder clergy, and a horror-stricken one upon Anne's; while Cecil pronounced her inevitable dictum, that at Dunstone Mr. Venn always preached in a gown, and "we" should never let him think of anything nonsensical.

Rosamond was provoked into a display of her solitary bit of ecclesiastical knowledge—"A friar's gown, the most Popish vestment in the church."

Cecil, thoroughly angered, flushed up to the eyes and bit her lips, unable to find a reply, while all the gentlemen laughed. Frank asked if it were really so, and Mr. Bindon made the well-known explanation that the Geneva gown was neither more nor less than the monk's frock.

"I shall write and ask Mr. Venn," gasped Cecil; but her husband stifled the sound by saying, "I saw little Pettitt, Julius, this afternoon, overwhelmed with gratitude to you for all the care you took of his old mother, and all his waxen busts."

"Ah! by the bye!" said Charlie, "I did meet the Rector staggering out, with the fascinating lady with the long eyelashes in one arm, and the moustached hero in the other."

"There was no pacifying the old lady without," said Julius. "I had just coaxed her to the door, when she fell to wringing her hands. Ah! those lovely models, that were worth thirty shillings each, with natural hair—that they should be destroyed! If the heat or the water did but come near them, Adolphus would never get over it. I could only pacify her by promising to go back for these idols of his heart as soon as she was safe; and after all, I had to dash at them through the glass, and that was the end of my spectacles."

"Where was Pettitt himself?"

"Well employed, poor little fellow, saving the people in those three cottages of his. No one supposed his shop in danger, but the fire took a sudden freak and came down Long Street; and though the house is standing, it had to be emptied and deluged with water to save it. I never knew Pettitt had a mother till I found her mounting guard, like one distracted, over her son's bottles of perfumery."

"And dyes?" murmured Raymond under his breath; but Frank caught the sound, and said, "Ah, Julius! don't I remember his inveigling you into coming out with scarlet hair?"

"I don't think I've seen him since," said Julius, laughing. "I believe he couldn't resist such an opportunity of practising his art. And for my part, I must say for myself, that it was in our first holidays, and Raymond and Miles had been black and blue the whole half-year from having fought my battles whenever I was called either 'Bunny' or 'Grandfather.' So when he assured me he could turn my hair to as sweet a raven-black as Master Poynsett's, I thought it would be pleasing to all, forgetting that he could not dye my eyes, and that their effect would have been some degrees more comical."

"For shame, Julius!" said Rosamond. "Don't you know that one afternoon, when Nora had cried for forty minutes over her sum, she declared that she wanted to make her eyes as beautiful as Mr. Charnock's. Well, what was the effect?"

"Startling," said Raymond. "He came down in shades of every kind of crimson and scarlet. A fearful object, with his pink-and-white face glowing under it."

"And what I had to undergo from Susan!" added Julius. "She washed me, and soaped me, and rubbed me, till I felt as if all the threshing-machines in the county were about my head, lecturing me all the time on the profanity of flying against Scripture by trying to alter one's hair from what Providence had made it. Nothing would do; her soap only turned it into shades of lemon and primrose. I was fain to let her shave my head as if I had a brain fever; and I was so horribly ashamed for years after, that I don't think I have set foot in Long Street since till to-day."

"Pettitt is a queer little fellow," said Herbert. "The most truculent little Radical to hear him talk, and yet staunch in his votes, for he can't go against those whose hair he has cut off from time immemorial."

"I hope he has not lost much," said Julius.

"His tenements are down, but they were insured; and as to his stock, he says he owes its safety entirely to you, Julius. I think he would present you with both his models as a testimonial, if you could only take them," said Raymond.

Cecil had neither spoken nor laughed through all this. She was nursing her wrath; and after marching out of the dining-room, lay in wait to intercept her husband, and when she had claimed his attention, began, "Rosamond ought not to be allowed to say such things."

"What things?"

"Speaking in that improper way about a gown."

"She seems to have said what was the fact."

"It can't be! It is preposterous! I never heard it before."

"Nor I; but Bindon evidently is up in those matters."

"It was only to support Rosamond; and I am quite sure she said it out of mere opposition to me. You ought to speak to Julius."

"About what?" said Raymond.

"Her laughing whenever I mention Dunstone, and tell them the proper way of doing things."

"There may be different opinions about the proper way of doing things." Then as she opened her eyes in wonder and rebuke, he continued, in his elder-brotherly tone of kindness, "You know I told you already that you had better not interfere in matters concerning his church and parish."

"We always managed things at Dunstone."

Hang Dunstone! was with some difficulty suppressed; but in an extra gentle voice Raymond said, "Your father did what he thought his duty, but I do not think it mine, nor yours, to direct Julius in clerical matters. It can only lead to disputes, and I will not have them."

"It is Rosamond. I'm sure I don't dispute."

"Listen, Cecil!" he said. "I can see that your position may be trying, in these close quarters with a younger brother's wife with more age and rank than yourself."

"That is nothing. An Irish earl, and a Charnock of Dunstone!"

"Dunstone will be more respected if you keep it in the background," he said, holding in stronger words with great difficulty. "Once for all, you have your own place and duties, and Rosamond has hers. If you meddle in them, nothing but annoyance can come of it; and remember, I cannot be appealed to in questions between you and her. Julius and I have gone on these nine-and-twenty years without a cloud between us, and I'm sure you would not wish to bring one now."

Wherewith he left her bewildered. She did not perceive that he was too impartial for a lover, but she had a general sense that she had come into a rebellious world, where Dunstone and Dunstone's daughter were of no account, and her most cherished notions disputed. What was the lady of the

manor to do but to superintend the church, parsonage, and parish generally? Not her duty? She had never heard of such a thing, nor did she credit it. Papa would come home, make these degenerate Charnocks hear reason, and set all to rights.

CHAPTER VI
Wedding Visits

Young Mrs. Charnock Poynsett had plenty of elasticity, and her rebuffs were less present to her mind in the morning than to that of her husband, who had been really concerned to have to inflict an expostulation; and he was doubly kind, almost deferential, giving the admiration and attention he felt incumbent on him to the tasteful arrangements of her wedding presents in her own sitting-room.

"And this clock I am going to have in the drawing-room, and these Salviati glasses. Then, when I have moved out the piano, I shall put the sofa in its place, and my own little table, with my pretty Florentine ornaments."

Raymond again looked annoyed. "Have you spoken to my mother?" he said.

"No; she never goes there."

"Not now, but if ever she can bear any move it will be her first change, and I should not like to interfere with her arrangements."

"She could never have been a musician, to let the piano stand against the wall. I shall never be able to play."

"Perhaps that might be contrived," said Raymond, kindly. "*Here* you know is your own domain, where you can do as you please."

"Yes; but I am expected to play in the evening. Look at all those things. I had kept the choicest for the drawing-room, and it is such a pity to hide them all up here."

Raymond felt for the mortification, and was unwilling to cross her again, so he said, "I will ask whether my mother would object to having the piano moved."

"This morning?"

"After eleven o'clock—I never disturb her sooner; but you shall hear before I go to Backsworth."

"An hour lost," thought Cecil; but she was too well bred to grumble, and she had her great work to carry on of copying and illustrating her journal.

Mrs. Poynsett readily consented. "Oh yes, my dear, let her do whatever she likes. Don't let me be a bugbear. A girl is never at home till she has had her will of the furniture. I think she will find that moving out the piano betrays the fading of the rest of the paper, but that is her affair. She is free to do just as she likes. I dare say the place does look antediluvian to young eyes."

So Raymond was the bearer of his mother's full permission; and Cecil presided with great energy over the alterations, which she carried out by the aid of the younger servants, to the great disgust of their seniors. She expected the acclamations of her contemporaries; but it happened that the first of them to cross the room was Julius, on his way to his mother's room after luncheon, and he, having on a pair of make-shift glasses, till the right kind could be procured from London, was unprepared for obstacles in familiar regions, stumbled over an ottoman, and upset a table with the breakage of a vase.

He apologized, with much regret; but the younger brothers made an outcry. "What has come to the place? Here's the table all over everything!"

"And where are the bronzes?"

"And the humming-birds? Miles's birds, that he brought home after his first voyage."

"And the clock with the two jolly little Cupids? Don't you remember Miles and Will Bowater dressing them up for men-of-war's men? Mother could not bring herself to have them undressed for a year, and all the time the clock struck nohow!"

"This is an anatomical study instead of a clock," lamented Frank. "I say, Cecil, do you like your friends to sit in their bones, like Sydney Smith?"

"I never saw such a stupid old set of conservatives!" broke in Rosamond, feeling for Cecil's mortification. "In an unprejudiced eye the room looks infinitely better, quite revivified! You ought to be much obliged to Cecil for letting you see all her beautiful things."

"Why don't you favour us with yours?" said Charlie.

"I know better! Mine aren't fit to wipe the shoes of Cecil's! When I get into the Rectory you'll see how hideous they are!" said Rosamond, with the merriest complacency. "Couvre-pieds to set your teeth on edge, from the non-commissioned officers' wives; and the awfullest banner-screen you ever saw, worked by the drum-major's own hands, with Her Majesty's arms on one side, and the De Courcy ones on the other, and glass eyes like stuffed birds' to the lion and unicorn. We nearly expired from suppressed laughter under the presentation."

Then she went round, extorting from the lads admiration for Cecil's really beautiful properties, and winning gratitude for her own cordial praise, though it was not the artistic appreciation they deserved. Indeed, Cecil yielded to the general vote for the restoration of the humming-birds, allowing that, though she did not like stuffed birds in a drawing-room, she would not have banished them if she had known their history.

This lasted till Charlie spied a carriage coming up the drive, which could be seen a long way off, so that there was the opportunity for a general *sauve qui peut*. Cecil represented that Rosamond ought to stay and receive her bridal visits; but she was unpersuadable. "Oh no! I leave all that for you! My time will come when I get into the Rectory. We are going in the dog-cart to the other end of the parish.—What's its name—Squattlesea Marsh, Julius?"

"Squattlesford!" said Charlie. "If Julius means to drive you, look out for your neck!"

"No, it's the other way, I'm going to drive Julius!—Come along, or we shall be caught!"

Cecil stood her ground, as did Anne, who was too weary and indifferent to retreat, and Frank, who had taken another view of the carriage as it came nearer.

"I must apologize for having brought nothing but my father's card," said Lady Tyrrell, entering with her sister, and shaking hands: "there's no such thing as dragging him out for a morning call."

"And Mr. Charnock Poynsett is not at home," replied Cecil. "He found so much county business waiting for him, that he had to go to Backsworth."

"It is the better opportunity for a little private caucus with you," returned Lady Tyrrell, "before the meeting to-morrow. I rather fancy the gentlemen have one of their own."

"Some are to dine here to-night," said Cecil.

"We ladies had better be prepared with our proposals," said Lady Tyrrell.

At the same time Frank drew near Miss Vivian with a large book, saying, "These are the photographs you wished to see."

He placed the book on the ottoman, and would thus have secured a sort of *tête-à-tête*; but Eleonora did not choose to leave Mrs Miles Charnock out, and handed her each photograph in turn, but could only elicit a cold languid "Thank you." To Anne's untrained eye these triumphs of architecture were only so many dull representations of 'Roman Catholic churches,' and she would much rather have listened to the charitable plans of the other two ladies, for the houseless factory women of Wil'sbro'.

The bazaar, Lady Tyrrell said, must be first started by the Member's wife; and there should be an innermost committee, of not more than three, to dispose of stalls and make arrangements.

"You must be one," said Cecil. "I know no one yet."

"You will, long before it comes off. In fact, I am as great a stranger as yourself. Ah! there's an opportunity!" as the bell pealed. "The Bowaters, very likely; I saw their Noah's ark as I passed the Poynsett Arms, with the horses taken out. I wonder how many are coming—worthy folks!"

Which evidently meant insufferable bores.

"Is there not a daughter?" asked Cecil.

"You need not use the singular, though, by the bye, most of them are married."

"Oh, pray stay!" entreated Cecil, as there were signs of leave-taking.

"I should do you no good. You'll soon learn that I am a sort of Loki among the Asagötter."

Cecil laughed, but had time to resume her somewhat prim dignity before the lengthened disembarkation was over, and after all, produced only four persons; but then none were small—Mrs. Bowater was a harsh matron, Mr. Bowater a big comely squire, the daughters both tall, one with an honest open face much like Herbert's, only with rather less youth and more intelligence, the other a bright dark glowing gipsy-faced young girl.

Eleonora Vivian, hitherto gravely stiff and reserved, to poor Frank's evident chagrin, at once flashed into animation, and met the elder Miss Bowater with outstretched hands, receiving a warm kiss. At the same time Mr. Bowater despatched Frank to see whether his mother could admit a visitor; and Lady Tyrrell observed, "Ah! I was about to make the same petition; but I will cede to older friends, for so I suppose I must call you, Mr. Bowater—though my acquaintance is of long standing enough!"

And she put on a most charming smile, which Mr. Bowater received with something inarticulate that might be regarded as a polite form of 'fudge,' which made Cecil think him a horribly rude old man, and evidently discomposed his wife very much.

Frank brought back his mother's welcome to the Squire; but by this time Eleonora and Miss Bowater had drawn together into a window, in so close and earnest a conversation that he could not break into it, and with almost visible reluctance began to talk to the younger sister, who on her side was desirous of joining in the bazaar discussion, which had been started again in full force; until there was a fresh influx of visitors, when Lady Tyrrell decidedly took leave with her sister, and Frank escorted them to their carriage, and returned no more.

In the new shuffling of partners, the elder Miss Bowater found herself close to Anne, and at once inquired warmly for Miles, with knowledge and interest in naval affairs derived from a sailor brother, Miles's chief friend and messmate in his training and earlier voyages. There was something in Joanna Bowater's manner that always unlocked hearts, and Anne was soon speaking without her fence of repellant stiffness and reserve. Certainly Miles was loved by his mother and brothers more than he could be by an old playfellow and sisterly friend, and yet there was something in Joanna's tone that gave Anne a sense of fellow-feeling, as if she had met a countrywoman in this land of strangers; and she even told how Miles had thought it right to send her home, thinking that she might be a comfort to his mother. "And not knowing all that was going to happen!" said poor Anne, with an irrepressible sigh, both for her own blighted hopes, and for the whirl into which her sore heart had fallen.

"I think you will be," said Joanna, brightly; "though it must be strange coming on so many. Dear Mrs. Poynsett is so kind!"

"Yes," said Anne, coldly.

"Ah! you don't know her yet. And Lady Rosamond! She is delightful!"

"Have you seen her!"

"We met them just now in the village, but my brother is enchanted. And do you know what was Julius's first introduction to her? It was at a great school-feast, where they had the regimental children as well as the town ones. A poor little boy went off in an epileptic fit, and Julius found her holding him, with her own hand in his mouth to hinder the locking of the teeth. He said her fingers were bitten almost to the bone, but she made quite light of it."

"That was nice!" said Anne; but then, with a startled glance, and in an undertone, she added, "Are they Christians?"

Joanna Bowater paused for a moment between dismay and desire for consideration, and in that moment her father called to her, "Jenny, do you remember the dimensions of those cottages in Queckett's Lane?" and she had to come and serve for his memory, while he was indoctrinating a younger squire with the duties of a landlord.

Meanwhile Mrs. Bowater was, for the tenth time, consulting her old friend upon Mrs. Hornblower's capabilities of taking care of Herbert, and betraying a little disappointment that his first sermon had not yet been heard; and when his voice was complimented, she hoped Julius would spare it—too much exertion could not be good for so young a man, and though dear Herbert looked so strong, no one would believe how much sleep he required. Then she observed, "We found Camilla Vivian—Lady Tyrrell I mean—calling. Have you seen her?"

"No."

"Well, she really seems improved!"

"Mr. Bowater has been telling me she is handsomer than ever!"

"Oh yes! That's all gentlemen think of; but I meant in other ways. She seems full of the rebuilding of St. Nicholas, and to be making great friends with your new daughter. You don't think," lowering her voice, "that Raymond would have any objection to meeting her?"

"Certainly not!"

"I did not suppose he would, but I thought I would just ask you. It would be rather marked not to invite him for the 3rd, you know; and Jenny was always so fond of poor Emily, kept up a correspondence with her to the last. It was the first time she had met the little one since they came back. Not that she is little now, she is very tall and quite handsome *even* by the side of Edith. We just saw Lady Rosamond—a sweet face—and Herbert perfectly raves about her!"

"She is a most unselfish warm-hearted creature!" said Mrs. Poynsett.

"I am so glad! And Miles's wife, I hope she will come. Poor thing, she looks very poorly."

"Yes, I am very anxious about her. If she is not better in a day or two, I shall insist on her having advice."

"Poor dear, I don't wonder! But she had better come to Strawyers; Jenny will cheer her if any one can, and we shall have a nice lively party, I hope! She will only mope the more if she never goes out."

"I am afraid she is hardly equal to it; besides, poor child," added Mrs. Poynsett, "she seems to have been strictly brought up, and to think our ways rather shocking; and Miles wrote to me not to press her to go into society till he comes home."

"Ah! well, I call that a mistake!" puffed out good-humoured Mrs. Bowater. "Very bad for the poor girl's spirits. By the bye, I hope Julius does not object to Herbert's dancing—not at a public ball, you know, but at home—for if he did, I would try to arrange something else, it would be so hard for the poor boy to have to look on."

"I don't know, I don't think he could," said the mother, considering.

"You see, we thought of a dinner-party for as many as possible. Frank and Charlie won't mind dining in the schoolroom, I know, and having the rest for a dance in the evening; but if Julius did think it unclerical—Jenny says he won't, and papa laughs, and says, 'Poh! poh! Julius is no fool;' but people are so much more particular than they used to be, and I would not get the dear boy into a scrape for the world."

Mrs. Poynsett undertook to ascertain his opinions on this knotty point, and to let her know if they were adverse; and then she begged for a visit from Jenny, whose brother had no accommodation for her in his lodgings. She could not be spared till after the entertainment on the 3rd, nor till a visit from her married sister was over; but afterwards, her mother was delighted that she should come and look after Herbert, who seemed as much on the maternal mind as if he had not batted his way through Eton, and boated it through Oxford.

Mrs. Poynsett obtained her word with Julius in good time that evening. He laughed a little. "Poor Herbs! when will people understand that it is the spirit of the thing, the pursuit, not the individual chance participation in any particular amusement, that is unclerical, as they are pleased to call it?"

"What do you think of Herbert?"

"A boy, and a very nice boy; but if he doesn't get his healthful play somehow, he will burst out like a closed boiler some day."

"A muscular Christian on your hands?"

"Not theoretically, for he has been well taught; but it's a great animal that needs to work off its steam, and if I had known it, I would not have undertaken the problem of letting him do that, without setting up bad habits, or scandalizing the parish and Bindon—who is young the other way, and has no toleration. We had this morning's service in a state of siege from all the dogs. Herbert thought he had shut them safely up, but they were all at his heels in the churchyard; and though he rated them home, and shut all the doors, we heard them whining and scratching at each in turn."

"I thought I should have died of it," said Rosamond, entering. "His face grew red enough to set his surplice on fire, and Mr. Bindon glared at him, and he missed his verse in the Psalm; for there was the bull terrier, crouching and looking abject at the vestry-door, just restrained by his eye from coming further."

"What shall you do about it, Julius?" asked his mother, much amused.

"Oh, that will remedy itself. All dogs learn to understand the bell."

And then the others began to drop in, and were told of the invitation that was coming.

"I say, Rosamond," cried Charlie, "can brothers and sisters-in-law dance together?"

"That depends on how the brothers-in-law dance," returned Rosamond. "Some one, for pity's sake, play a waltz!—Come along Charlie! the hall is a sweet place for it!—Whistle, Julius!—Frank, whistle!"

And away she whirled. Frank, holding out his hands, was to his surprise accepted by Cecil, and disappeared with her into the hall. Julius stood by the mantelpiece, with the first shadow on his brow his mother had seen since his arrival. Presently he spoke in a defensive apologetic tone: "She has always been used to this style of thing."

"Most naturally," said the mother.

"Not that they ever did more than their position required, and Lady Rathforlane is a truly careful mother. Of course some things might startle you stay-at-home people; but in all essentials—"

"I see what you mean."

"And what seems like rattle is habit."

"Simple *gaieté de cœur*!"

"So it is better to acquiesce till it subsides of itself. You see it is hard, after such a life of change and variety, to settle down into a country parsonage."

"What are you saying there?" said Rosamond, tripping in out of breath.

"That I don't know how you are to put up with a pink-eyed parson, and a hum-drum life," said Julius, holding out a caressing hand.

"Now that's hard," pleaded she; "only because I took a frolic with Baby Charles! I say, Julius, shall we give it up altogether and stay at home like good children? I believe that is what would suit the told Rabbit much better than his kid gloves,"—and her sweet face looked up at him with a meek candid gaze.

"No," he said, "that would not do. The Bowaters are our oldest friends. But, Rosie, as you *are* a clergyman's wife, could you not give up round dances?"

"Oh no, no! That's too bad. I'd rather never go to a dance at all, than sit still, or be elbowed about in the square dances. You never told me you expected that!"—and her tones were of a child petulant at injustice.

"Suppose," he said, as a delightful solution, "you only gratified Frank and Charlie by waltzing with them."

She burst into a ringing laugh. "My brothers-in-law! How very ridiculous! Suppose you included the curates?"

"You know what I mean," he said gravely.

"Oh, bother the parson's wife! Haven't I seen them figuring away by scores? Did we ever have a regimental ball that they were not the keenest after?"

"So they get themselves talked of!" said Julius, as Anne's quiet entrance broke up the dialogue.

Mrs. Poynsett had listened, glad there was no appeal to her, conscious that she did not understand the merits of the case, and while she doubted whether her eldest son had love enough, somewhat afraid lest his brother had not rather too much for the good of his lawful supremacy.

CHAPTER VII
Unfruitful Suggestions

"Raymond! Can you spare me a moment before you go into your mother's room?"

It was Rosamond who, to his surprise, as he was about to go down-stairs, met him and drew him into her apartment—his mother's own dressing-room, which he had not entered since the accident.

"Is anything the matter?" he said, thinking that Julius might have spared him from complaints of Cecil.

"Oh no! only one never can speak to you, and Julius told me that you could tell me about Mrs. Poynsett. I can't help thinking she could be moved more than she is." Then, as he was beginning to speak, "Do you know that, the morning of the fire, I carried her with only one of the maids to the couch under the tent-room window? Susan was frightened out of her wits, but she was not a bit the worse for it."

"Ah! that was excitement."

"But if it did not hurt her then, why should it hurt her again? There's old General M'Kinnon, my father's old friend, who runs about everywhere in a wheeled-chair with a leg-rest; and I can't think why she should not do the same."

Raymond smiled kindly on her, but rather sadly; perhaps he was recollecting his morning's talk about the occupancy of the drawing-room. "You know it is her spine," he said.

"So it is with him. His horse rolled over him at Sebastopol, and he has never walked since. I wanted to write to Mary M'Kinnon; but Julius said I had better talk to you, because he was only at home for a fortnight, when she was at the worst, and you knew more about it."

"Yes," said Raymond, understanding more than the Irish tongue fully expressed. "I never saw a woman sit better than she did, and she looked as young and light in the saddle as you could, till that day, when, after the rains, the bank where the bridle-path to Squattles End was built up, gave way with the horse's feet, and down she went twenty feet, and was under the horse when Miles and I got down to her! We brought her on a mattress to that room, not knowing whether she were alive; and she has never moved out of it! It was agony to her to be touched."

"Yes but it can't be that now. Was not that three years ago?"

"Not so much. Two and a half. We had Hayter down to see her, and he said perfect rest was the only chance for her."

"And has not he seen her lately?"

"He died last winter; and old Worth, who comes in once a week to look at her, is not fit for more than a little watching and attention. I dare say we all have learnt to acquiesce too much in her present state, and that more might be done. You see she has never had a lady's care, except now and then Jenny Bowater's."

"I do feel sure she could bear more now," said Rosamond, eagerly. "It would be such a thing if she could only be moved about that down-stairs floor."

"And be with us at meals and in the evening," said Raymond, his face lightening up. "Thank you, Rosamond!"

"I'll write to Mary M'Kinnon to-morrow, to ask about the chair," cried Rosamond; and Raymond, hearing the door-bell, hurried down, to find his wife standing alone over the drawing-room fire, not very complacent.

"Where have you been, Raymond?"

"I was talking to Rosamond. She has seen a chair on which it might be possible to move my mother about on this floor."

"I thought—" Cecil flushed. She was on the point of saying she thought Rosamond was not to interfere in her department any more than she in Rosamond's; but she kept it back, and changed it into "Surely the doctor and nurses must know best."

"A fresh eye often makes a difference," said Raymond. "To have her among us again—!" but he was cut short by the announcement of Mr. and Miss Fuller.

"Poor Mr. Fuller," as every one called him, was the incumbent of St. Nicholas, Willansborough, a college living always passed by the knowing old bachelor fellows, and as regularly proving a delusion to the first junior in haste for a wife. Twenty-five years ago Mr. Fuller had married upon this, which, as Mr. Bindon said, was rather a reason for not marrying—a town with few gentry, and a petty unthriving manufacture, needing an enormous amount of energy to work it properly, and getting—Mr. Fuller, with force yearly decreasing under the pressure of a sickly wife, ill-educated, unsatisfactory sons, and unhealthy, aimless daughters. Of late some assistance had been obtained, but only from Mr. Driver, the 'coach' or cramming tutor, who was directing the studies of Frank and half a dozen more youths, and his aid was strictly limited to a share in the Sunday services.

The eldest daughter accompanied the Vicar. Her mother had not health (or perhaps clothes) for a dinner-party, and it was the first time she had ever been in the house. Very shy and in much awe she was! Cecil viewed her as a constituent, and was elaborately civil and patronizing, doing the honours of all the photographs and illustrations on which she could lay hands, and only eliciting alternately 'Very nice,' and 'How sweet!' A little more was made of the alarms of the fire, and the preparations for clearing the house, and there was a further thaw about the bazaar. It would be such a relief from plain work, and she could get some lovely patterns from her cousin who had a missionary basket; but as to the burnt-out families, the little knowledge or interest she seemed to have about them was rather astounding, unless, as Rosamond suspected, she thought it 'shop,' and uninteresting to the great ladies of Compton-Poynsett Hall.

Meanwhile, her father made the apprehended request for the loan of Compton Church during the intervals of services, and when the Rector explained how brief those intervals would be, looked astonished, and dryly complimented him on his energy and his staff, somewhat as if the new broom were at the bottom of these congratulations.

The schools were to be used for services until a temporary iron church could be obtained, for which Julius, to make up for his churlishness in withholding his own church, made the handsomer donation, and held out hopes of buying it afterwards for the use of Squattles End. Then, having Mr. Fuller's ear to himself, he ventured to say, though cautiously, as to one who had been a clergyman before he was born, "I wish it were possible to dispense with this bazaar."

Mr. Fuller shrugged his shoulders. "If every one subscribed in the style of this family."

"They would be more likely to do so, without the appeal to secondary motives."

"Try them," said the elder man.

"Exactly what I want to do. I would put up the four walls, begin with what you get from the insurance, a weekly offertory, and add improvements as means came in. This is not visionary. I have seen proof of its success."

"It may serve in new-fashioned city missions, but in an old-established place like this it would create nothing but offence. When you have been in Orders as long as I have, you will find that there is nothing for it but to let people do what they will, not what one thinks best."

"Mr. Fuller," said Julius, eagerly, "will you try an experiment? Drop this bazaar, and I promise you our collection every Sunday evening for the year, giving notice of it to my people, and to such of yours as may be present."

"I do not despise your offer," said Mr. Fuller, laying his hand upon his arm. "You mean it kindly, and if I were in your place, or had only my own feelings to consider, I might attempt it. But it would be only mischievous to interfere with the bazaar. Lady Tyrrell—all the ladies, in fact—have

set their minds on it, and if I objected there would instantly be a party cry against me, and that is the one thing I have always avoided."

His tone of superior wisdom, meek and depressed as he always was, tried the Rector's patience enough to make his forehead burn and bring out his white eyebrows in strong relief. "How about a blessing on the work?" he asked, suppressing so much that he hardly knew this was spoken aloud.

Again Mr. Fuller smiled. He had been a bit of a humorist when he was an Oxford don. "Speak of that to Briggs," he said, "and he would answer, 'Cash for me, and the blessing may take care of itself.' As to the ladies—why, they deafen you about blessings on their humble efforts, and the widow's mite."

"Simply meaning that they want their amusement a little—"

"Buttered over," said Mr. Fuller, supplying the word. "Though you are hard on them, Charnock—I don't know about the fine ladies; but there are quiet folk who will work their fingers to the bone, and can do nothing else."

"That's true," said Julius; "and one would gladly find a safe outlet for their diligence."

"You do not trust to it for bringing the blessing," said Mr. Fuller in a tone that Julius liked even less than the mere hopeless faint-heartedness, for in it there was sarcasm on faith in aught but £ *s. d.*

The two brothers held another discussion on this matter later that night, on the stairs, as they were on their way to their rooms.

"Won't you come to this meeting to-morrow, Julius?" asked Raymond.

"I don't see that I should be of any use, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you would make what seems to me the right proposal, and I could be any support in it."

"What's that?"

"To use the insurance to put up the mere shells and plain indispensable fittings of the church and town-hall, then make the drainage of Water Lane and Hall Street the first object for the rates, while the church is done by subscription and voluntary effort."

"You put the drainage first—even before the church?" said Raymond, smiling, with an elder brother's satisfaction in such an amount of common sense.

"Of course I do," said Julius. "An altar and four walls and chairs are all that ought to be sought for. Little good can be done to people's souls while their bodies are in the feverish discomfort of foul air and water. This is an opportunity not to be wasted, while all the houses are down, town-hall and all."

"The very thing I told Briggs and the others this morning," said Raymond; "but I could not get a hearing; they said there never had been any illness worth mentioning, and in fact scouted the whole matter, as people always do."

"Yes, they take it as a personal insult when you mention the odorous—or odious, savours sweet," said Julius. "I heard a good deal of that when we had the spell of cholera at St. Awdry's."

"I shall work on at it, and I trust to get it done in time," said Raymond; "but it will not be at once. The subject is too new to them, and the irritation it produces must subside before they will hear reason. Besides, the first thing is to employ and feed these paper-makers."

"Of course."

"That will pretty well absorb this first meeting. The ladies will manage that, I think; and when this is provided for, I will try what I can do at the committee; but there is no good in bringing it forward at this great public affair, when every ass can put in his word. Everything depends on whom they choose for the new mayor. If Whitlock comes in, there is some chance of sense and reason being heard. Good night."

As Raymond said, the more immediate object of the meeting fixed for the ensuing day, was to provide for the employment of the numerous women thrown out of employment by the destruction

of the paper-mills. A subscription was in hand, but not adequate to the need; and moreover, it was far more expedient to let them maintain themselves.

How this was to be done was the question. Cecil told her husband that at Dunstone they made the women knit stockings; and he replied by recommending the suppression of Dunstone. How strange it was that what she had been used to consider as the source of honour should be here held in what seemed to her disesteem!

Lady Tyrrell's ponies were tinkling up to the door of the hotel where the meeting was to be held, and her gracious smile recalled Cecil's good-humour; Raymond saw them to their seats, and then had to go and take the chair himself on the platform—first, however, introducing his wife to such of the ladies present as he recollected.

She thought he wanted her to sit between melancholy white faced Mrs. Fuller and a bony spinster in a poke-bonnet whom he called Miss Slater; but Cecil, concluding that this last could have no vote, and that the Vicarage was secure, felt free to indulge herself by getting back to Lady Tyrrell, who had scarcely welcomed her before exclaiming, "Mrs. Duncombe, I did not know you were returned."

"I came back on the first news of your flare-up," said the newcomer. "I only came down this morning. I would not have missed this meeting for anything. It is a true woman's question. A fair muster, I see," looking round with her eye-glass, and bowing to several on the platform, especially to Raymond, who returned the bow rather stiffly.

"Ah! let me introduce you," said Lady Tyrrell. "Mrs. Raymond Charnock Poynsett."

"I am very glad to see you embarked in the cause," said the lady, frankly holding out her hand. "May we often meet in the same manner, though I honestly tell you I'm not of your party; I should go dead against your husband if we only had a chance."

"Come, you need not be so aggressive," laughed Lady Tyrrell; "you haven't a vote yet. You are frightening Mrs. Poynsett." It was true. Even Cecil Charnock was born too late to be one of the young ladies who, in the first decades of the reformed Parliament, used to look on a Liberal as a *lusus naturæ*, whom they hardly believed to be a gentleman. But a lady who would openly accost the Member's bride with a protest against his politics, was a being beyond her experience, and the contemplation fairly distracted her from her husband's oratory.

She would have taken Miss Slater for the strong-minded female far rather than this small slim person, with the complexion going with the yellower species of red hair and chignon, not unlike a gold-pheasant's, while the thin aquiline nose made Cecil think of Queen Elizabeth. The dress was a tight-fitting black silk, with a gorgeous many-coloured gold-embroidered oriental mantle thrown loosely over it, and a Tyrolean hat, about as large as the pheasant's comb, tipped over her forehead, with cords and tassels of gold; and she made little restless movements and whispered remarks during the speeches.

There was to be a rate to renew the town-hall. The rebuilding of the paper-mills and dwelling-houses was fairly covered by the insurance; but the Vicar, in his diffident apologetic voice, stated that the church had been insufficiently insured, and moreover, that many more sittings were needed than the former building had contained. He then read the list of subscriptions already promised, expressed hopes of more coming in, invited ladies to take collecting cards, and added that he was happy to announce that the ladies of the congregation had come forward with all the beneficence of their sex, and raised a sum to supply a new set of robes.

Here the chairman glanced at his wife, but she was absorbed in watching Mrs. Duncombe's restless hands; and the look was intercepted by Lady Tyrrell's eyes, which flashed back sympathetic amusement, with just such a glance as used to pass between them in old times; but the effect was to make the Member's face grave and impassive, and his eyes fix on the papers before him.

The next moment Cecil was ardently gazing at Mr. Fuller as he proceeded to his hopes of the bazaar to be held under the most distinguished patronage, and of which he spoke as if it were the

subject of anticipations as sanguine as any the poor man could ever appear to indulge in. And there was, in fact, the greatest stamping and cheering there had yet been, perhaps in compliment to the M.P.'s young bride—at least, so Lady Tyrrell whispered, adding that everybody was trying to see her.

Then Mr. Charnock Poynsett himself took up the exposition of the third branch of the subject, the support of the poor families thrown out of work at the beginning of winter. There could be no employment at the paper-mills till they were repaired; and after the heavy losses, they could not attempt to keep their people together by any payment. It had been suggested that the readiest way of meeting the difficulty, would be to employ the subscriptions already promised in laying in a stock of material to be made up into garments, and then dispose of them out to the women at their homes; and appointing a day once a week when the work should be received, the pay given, and fresh material supplied, by a party of volunteer ladies.

This was, in fact, what he had been instructed to propose by the kindly souls who ordinarily formed the St. Nicholas *bureau de charité*, who had instructed him to be their mouthpiece. There was due applause as the mayor seconded his resolution; but in the midst a clear, rather high-pitched voice rose up close to Cecil, saying, "Mr. Chairman, allow me to ask what sale is anticipated for these garments?"

"I am told that there is a demand for them among the poor themselves," said Raymond, judiciously concealing how much he was taken aback by this female interference.

"Allow me to differ. A permanent work society numbering a few women otherwise unemployed may find a sufficient sale in the neighbourhood under the patronage of charitable ladies; but when you throw in ninety-five or one hundred pair of hands depending on their work for their livelihood, the supply must necessarily soon go beyond any demand, even fictitious. It will not do to think of these women like fancy knitters or embroiderers whose work is skilled. Most of them can hardly mend their own clothes, and the utmost that can be expected of them is the roughest slop work."

"Do you wish any expedient to be proposed?" asked the chairman, in a sort of aside.

"Yes, I have one. I spent yesterday in collecting information."

"Will Captain Duncombe move it?" suggested Raymond.

"Oh no! he is not here. No, it is no use to instruct anybody; I will do it myself, if you please."

And before the astonished eyes of the meeting, the gold-pheasant hopped upon the platform, and with as much ease as if she had been Queen Bess dragooning her parliament, she gave what even the astounded gentlemen felt to be a sensible practical exposition of ways and means.

She had obtained the address of a warehouse ready to give such rough work as the women could be expected to do; but as they were unaccustomed to work at home, and were at present much crowded from the loss of so many houses, and could besides be little depended on for working well enough without superintendence, her plan was to hire a room, collect the women, and divide the superintendence between the ladies; who should give out the work, see that it was properly done, keep order, and the like. She finished off in full order, by moving a resolution to this effect.

There was a pause, and a little consultation among the gentlemen, ending by Raymond's absolutely telling Mr. Fuller that it was a very sensible practical arrangement, and that it *must* be seconded; which the Vicar accordingly did, and it was carried without opposition, as in truth nothing so good had been thought of; and the next thing was to name a committee of ladies, a treasurer and auditor of accounts. There would be no work on Saturdays, so if the ladies would each undertake half a day once a fortnight, the superintendence need not be a burthen.

Mrs. Duncombe and Miss Slater undertook the first start and preliminary arrangements, then each would take her half day in rotation. Lady Tyrrell and her sister undertook two, Cecil two more, and others were found to fill up the vacant space. The chairman moved a vote of thanks to the lady for her suggestion, which she acknowledged by a gracious bow, not without triumph; and the meeting broke up.

Some one asked after Captain Duncombe as she descended into private life. "There's a wonderful filly that absorbs all his attention. All Wil'sbro' might burn as long as Dark Hag thrives! When do I expect him? I don't know; it depends on Dark Hag," she said in a tone of superior good-natured irony, then gathered up the radiant mantle and tripped off along the central street of the little old-fashioned country town, with gravelled not paved side-walks.

"Isn't she very superior?" said Cecil, when her husband had put her on horseback.

"I suppose she is very clever."

"And she spoke capitally."

"If she were to speak. What would your father think of her?"

But for the first time Cecil's allegiance had experienced a certain shock. Some sort of pedestal had hitherto been needful to her existence; she was learning that Dunstone was an unrecognized elevation in this new country, and she had seen a woman attain to a pinnacle that almost dazzled her, by sheer resource and good sense.

All the discussion she afterwards heard did not tend to shake her opinion; Raymond recounted the adventure at his mother's kettle-drum, telling of his own astonishment at the little lady's assurance.

"I do not see why she should be censured," said Cecil. "You were all at a loss without her."

"She should have got her husband to speak for her," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"He was not there."

"Then she should have instructed some other gentleman," said Mrs. Poynsett. "A woman spoils all the effect of her doings by putting herself out of her proper place."

"Perfectly disgusting!" said Julius.

Cecil had decidedly not been disgusted, except by the present strong language; and not being ready at repartee, she was pleased when Rosamond exclaimed, "Ah! that's just what men like, to get instructed in private by us poor women, and then gain all the credit for originality."

"It is the right way," said the mother. "The woman has much power of working usefully and gaining information, but the one thing that is not required of her is to come forward in public."

"Very convenient for the man!" laughed Rosamond.

"And scarcely fair," said Cecil.

"Quite fair," said Rosamond, turning round, so that Cecil only now perceived that she had been speaking in jest. "Any woman who is worth a sixpence had rather help her husband to shine than shine herself."

"Besides," said Mrs. Poynsett, "the delicate edges of true womanhood ought not to be frayed off by exposure in public."

"Yes," said Raymond. "The gain of an inferior power of man in public would be far from compensated by the loss in private of that which man can never supply."

"Granted," said Rosamond slyly though sleepily, "that it always is an inferior power of man, which it does not seem to have been in the actual case."

"It was a point on which she had special knowledge and information," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"And you were forced to thank her," said Cecil.

"Yes, in common civility," said Raymond; "but it was as much as I could do to get it done, the position was a false one altogether."

"In fact, you were all jealous," said Rosamond.

At which everybody laughed, which was her sole intention; but Cecil, who had said so much less, really thought what Rosamond said in mere play. Those extorted thanks seemed to her a victory of her sex in a field she had never thought of; and though she had no desire to emulate the lady, and felt that a daughter of Dunstone must remember *noblesse oblige*, the focus of her enthusiasm was in an odd state of shifting.

CHAPTER VIII
Unsatisfactory

On the evening of the party at Strawyers, Mrs. Poynsett lay on her sofa, thinking, with a trying recurrence, of that unfortunate and excellent German Dauphine, who was pronounced by the Duchess of Orleans to have died of her own stupidity.

After a fortnight had brought no improvement, but rather the reverse, to poor Anne's wan looks and feeble languid deportment, Mrs. Poynsett had insisted on her seeing the doctor; and had been assured by him that there was nothing amiss, and that if Mrs Miles Charnock could only be roused and occupied she would be perfectly well, but that her pining and depression might so lower her tone as to have a serious effect on her health.

There was no hope of her husband's return for at least a year, likely eighteen months. What was to be done with her? What could be a more unpropitious fate than for a Colonial girl, used to an active life of exertion and usefulness, and trained to all domestic arts, to be set down in a great English household where there was really nothing for her to do, and usefulness or superintendence would have been interfering; besides, as Miles had thoughts of settling at the Cape, English experience would serve her little.

She had not cultivation enough for any pursuit to interest her. She was not musical, could not draw; and when Mrs. Poynsett had, by way of experiment, asked her to read aloud an hour a day, and selected the *Lives of the Lindsays*, as an unexceptionable and improving book, full of Scottish history, and even with African interest, she dutifully did her task as an attention to her invalid mother-in-law, but in a droning husky tone, finding it apparently as severe a penance as it was to her auditor.

The doctor's chief prescription was horse exercise; but what would a constitutional canter be to one accustomed to free rides through the Bush? And she would generally be alone; for even if Charlie, her nearest approach to an ally, had not been going away from home in a few weeks, it could not be expected that he could often ride with her.

It was plain that every one of the whole family was giving continual shocks to Mr. Pilgrim's disciple, even when they felt most innocent; and though the mother was sometimes disposed to be angry, sometimes to laugh at the little shudder and compression of the lips she began to know, she perceived what an addition this must be to the unhappiness of the poor lonely stranger.

"She must be set to some good work," thought Mrs. Poynsett; "Julius might let her go to his old women. She might get on with them better than with the old women here. And there's Cecil's working affair, it would be just the thing to give her an object. I think I can get through this evening. I've made Susan bring my desk, with all Miles's letters from his first voyage. Shall I suppress the ball?"

Therewith Cecil made her entrance, in glossy white satin and deep lace, beautiful to behold, set off with rainbow glistening opals. She made a quiet complacent show of herself, as one not vain of fine clothes, but used to an affectionate family appreciation of her best attire; and it was the most friendly childlike bit of intimacy that had yet been attained between her and Mrs. Poynsett.

And when she sat down to wait for the others, Mrs. Poynsett ventured on telling her the prescription and her own perplexity, hoping for a voluntary offer to employ Anne at Willansborough; but Cecil only pitied her for having 'no resources'; and when Mrs. Poynsett ventured to suggest finding a niche for her in the work-room, the answer was—"Our days are all disposed of."

"You have two, I think?"

"True; but it would never do for me to give up one of my times. If I seemed to slacken, every one else would."

"What will you do when the Session begins?"

"I shall make some arrangement. I do not think Anne could ever take my place; she would have no authority."

Anne herself here entered, took her knitting, and sat down, apparently unaware of the little pluming gesture by which Cecil unconsciously demanded attention to her bridal satin. One white-gloved gentleman after another dropped in, but none presumed on a remark; Jenkins announced the carriages; but Rosamond had not appeared, and after an excursion up-stairs, Julius returned, declaring that the first carriage must not wait for her, they would come afterwards in the van, for there was something amiss in the dress, she had not had it on since the wedding.

"And she came in so late," said Cecil.

"That was my fault," he said. "We came through the village to leave a message at the doctor's;" and he then insisted that the other pair should set off, taking Frank and Charlie, and prevent dinner from being kept waiting; at which the boys made faces, and declared that it was a dodge of his to join Jenny's party in the schoolroom, instead of the solemn dinner; but they were obliged to submit; and it was not till twenty minutes later, that in glided something white, with blue cashmere and swan's-down over it, moving, as usual, with languid grace.

"Poor Julius!" smiled Rosamond with her dawdling dignity. "Every single thing turned out a misfit! As it is, there's a monstrous hole in my glove, which demands the benevolent fiction of my having torn it by the way. There, one second for the effect!—Good-bye, dear Mrs. Poynsett;—good-bye, Anne. Come, you monument of patience and resignation!"

For one moment she had slipped back her little mantle, then drawn it on, as, taking her husband's arm, she left the room; but that moment had set Anne's cheeks aflame, and left Mrs. Poynsett in a startled state of uncertainty, hoping her glance had been mistaken, wondering what could have been *more* amiss, and feeling incapable of entering on the subject with that severe young judge, of narrow experience.

Never had her eldest son failed to come and bid her good night on his way to his own room: it was the great break in her long sleepless hours, and she used to call it a reversal of the relations of those days when he used to watch for her kiss on her way to bed. Nor did he fail her now, but came and stood over her with his fragmentary tidings.

"An immense party—oh yes, there was he persuading them not to wait. Mr. Bowater took Rosamond in to dinner, Cecil went with Sir Harry Vivian. Yes, Lady Tyrrell was there, wonderfully handsome, but her expression strikes me as altered; there is the sort of pathetic look that, as Cecil said, is like the melancholy Medusa—I wonder if it is genuine. She seems greatly disposed to cultivate Cecil—I wonder what she does it for."

"Is Cecil attracted? I fancied she was."

"Yes, a good deal; and I fear the Wil'sbro' business will throw them together. It is unlucky on Frank's account likewise. I see we shall have it all over again there."

"I have great hope in his office taking him away. How was it with them to-night?"

"What I should call arrant coquetry, such as even Camilla never indulged in. The girl kept out of his way—was absolutely chill and repelling half the evening—throwing herself at the officers from Backsworth, till at last Frank obtained a waltz, and after that they were perfectly inseparable."

"If she coquets, she will soon disgust him! Did Cecil enjoy herself?"

"Oh yes: Phil Bowater opened the ball with her, and she dances very nicely—so quietly, Mrs. Bowater remarked it. As to Rosamond, she was in her native element—*is* indeed, for she would not hear of coming away when we did."

"And Julius?"

"Standing in a doorway, with others of his kind, absently talking, and watching Rosamond out of the tail of his eye. I say, mother," lowering his voice, "can't you give Rosamond a hint about her dress? Cecil says she can't go out with her again like *that*. Ah," as he heard a sigh, "I should not have worried you at night."

"No, you have not. Tell Cecil I will see about it. Rosamond will take it best from an old woman like me."

Mrs. Poynsett was quite conscious that Cecil had more high breeding and refinement than Rosamond, who was essentially the Irish Colonel's daughter, and that the cold temperament of the one irritated the warm nature of the other. More than one flash had revealed Rosamond's contempt for Cecil's assumptions and intolerance for her precision—besides, she was five years older, and had not an ideal in Dunstone.

After revolving what form of remonstrance would be least offensive during half the night and day, Mrs. Poynsett was not prepared for the appearance, about noon, of her son Julius, when, coming to what she termed the confidential side of her couch, he asked hesitatingly, and colouring, "Mother, I want you to tell me, was there anything amiss in Rose's dress last night?"

"You did not perceive—"

"I'm not used to the style of thing. Is it not the way with what you call full dress?"

"To a certain degree—" she began.

He caught her up. "And here has Cecil been putting my poor Rose into a perfect agony! It is only woman's censorious nonsense, isn't it, mother? Mere folly to think otherwise! I knew you would set my mind at rest; and if you would tell Cecil that you will not have Rosamond insulted, it would be as well."

"Stay, Julius," as he was walking off complacently, "I grieve, but I must confess that I was going to speak to Rosamond myself."

He looked very blank.

"Mind, I am certain that it is only an innocent following of what she has been brought up to;" and as he signed a sort of hurt acquiescence, as if trying to swallow the offence, she added, "When do you go out again?"

"Not till Monday, when we dine at Colonel Ross's. He is an old friend of Lord Rathforlane."

"Then I am inclined to let it cool. Sometimes advice that has been resented does its work."

"You don't think the interference justifiable?"

"Not from that quarter."

"And can it be needful to attend to it?"

"My dear Julius, it is not a style of dress I could ever have worn, nor have let my daughters have worn, if I had had any."

"Conclusive, that!" said Julius, getting up, more really angered with his mother than he had been since his childhood.

However, he conquered himself by the time he had reached the door, and came back to say, "I beg your pardon, mother, I know you would not say so without need."

"Thank you, my boy!" and he saw tears in her eyes, the first time he was conscious of having brought them. As he bent down to kiss her, she rallied, and cheerfully said, "I have no doubt it will all come right—Rosamond is too nice not to feel it at once."

No such thing; Rosamond was still furious. If he disapproved, she would submit to him; but he had seen nothing wrong, had he?

"My dear Rose, I told you I was no judge: you forget what my eyes are; and my mother—"

"You have been to your mother?"

"My dear, what could I do?"

"And you think I am going to insult my own mother and sisters to please any woman's finical prudish notions'? Pray what did Mrs. Poynsett say?"

The excuse of custom, pleaded by Mrs. Poynsett, only made Rosamond fiercer. She wished she had never come where she was to hear that her own mother was no judge of propriety, and her husband could not trust her, but must needs run about asking everybody if she were fit to be seen. Such a tempest Julius had never seen outside a back street in the garrison town. There seemed to

be nothing she would not say, and his attempts at soothing only added to her violence. Indeed, there was only one thing which would have satisfied her, and that was, that she had been perfectly right, and the whole world barbarously wrong; and she was wild with passion at perceiving that he had a confidence in his own mother which he could not feel in hers.

Nor would he insist that Raymond should force Cecil to apologize. "My dear," he said, "don't you know there are things easier to ask than to obtain?"

To which Rosamond replied, in another gust, that she would never again sit down to table with Cecil until she had apologized for the insult, not to herself, she did not care about that, but to the mother who had seen her dresses tried on: Julius must tell Raymond so, or take her away to any cottage at once. She would not stay where people blamed mamma and poisoned his mind against her! She believed he cared for them more than for her!

Julius had sympathized far longer with her offended feeling than another could have done; but he was driven to assert himself. "Nonsense, Rose, you know better," he said, in a voice of displeasure; but she pouted forth, "I don't know it. You believe every one against me, and you won't take my part against that nasty little spiteful prig!"

"Cecil has behaved very ill to you," said Julius, granting her rather over much; "but she is a foolish conceited child, who does not deserve that Raymond should be worried about her. I foresee plenty of grievances from her; but, Rosie, we must and will not let her come between us and Raymond. You don't know what a brother he has been to me—I hardly think I could have got through my first year at school but for him; and I don't think my sweet Rose could wish to do me such an ill turn as to stir up a feud with such a brother because his wife is provoking."

The luncheon-bell began to sound, and she sobbed out, "There then, go down, leave me alone! Go to them, since you are so fond of them all!"

"I don't think you could come down as you are," said Julius, gravely; "I will bring you something."

"It would choke me—choke me!" she sobbed out.

Julius knew enough of the De Lancy temperament to be aware that words carried them a long way, and he thought solitude would be so beneficial, that he summoned resolution to leave her; but he had not the face to appear alone, nor offer fictions to excuse her absence, so he took refuge in his dressing-room, until he had seen Cecil and Anne ride away from the hall door together.

For the two sisters-in-law had held a little indignation meeting, and Rosamond's misdemeanour had so far drawn them together, that Cecil had offered to take Anne to see the working party, and let her assist thereat.

The coast being clear, Julius went down, encountering nothing worse than the old butler, who came in while he was cutting cold beef, and to whom he said, "Lady Rosamond is rather knocked up; I am going to take her something up-stairs."

Jenkins received this as the result of a dance, but much wanted to fetch a tray, which Julius refused, and set off with an ale-glass in one hand, and in the other the plates with the beef and appliances, Jenkins watching in jealous expectation of a catastrophe, having no opinion of Mr. Julius's powers as a waiter. He was disappointed. The downfall was deferred till the goal was reached, and was then most salutary, for Rosamond sprang to pick up the knife and fork, laughed at his awkwardness, refused to partake without him, produced implements from her travelling-bag, and was as merry as she had been miserable.

Not a word on the feud was uttered; and the pair walked down to the village, where she was exemplary, going into all those more distasteful parts of her duties there, which she sometimes shirked.

And on her return, finding her long-expected letter from Miss M'Kinnon awaiting her, she forgot all offences in her ardour to indoctrinate everybody with the hopes it gave of affording Mrs. Poynsett a change of room, if not even greater variety. Unfortunately, this eagerness was not met

with a corresponding fervour. There was in the household the acquiescence with long-established invalidism, that sometimes settles down and makes a newcomer's innovations unwelcome. Raymond had spoken to the old doctor, who had been timid and discouraging; Susan resented the implication that the utmost had not been done for her dear mistress; and Mrs. Poynsett herself, though warmly grateful for Rosamond's affection, was not only nervously unwilling to try experiments, but had an instinctive perception that there was one daughter-in-law to whom her increased locomotion would scarcely be welcome, and by no means wished to make this distaste evident to Raymond. Cecil would not have been so strong against the risk and imprudence, if her wishes had been the other way. Moreover, she had been warned off from interference with the Rector's wife in the village, and she did not relish Rosamond's making suggestions as to her province, as she considered the house—above all, when she viewed that lady as in a state of disgrace. It was nothing less than effrontery; and Cecil became stiffer and colder than ever. She demanded of her mother-in-law whether there had been any promise of amendment.

"Oh! Julius will see to all that," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"It is a woman's question," returned Cecil.

"Not entirely."

"Fancy a clergyman's wife! It Mrs. Venn had appeared in that way at Dunstone!"

"You would have left it to Mr. Venn! My dear, the less said the sooner mended."

Cecil was silenced, but shocked, for she was far too young and inexperienced to understand that indecorous customs complied with as a matter of course, do not necessarily denote lack of innate modesty—far less, how they could be confounded with home allegiance; and as to Anne, poor Rosamond was, in her eyes, only too like the ladies who impeded Christiana on her outset.

So her ladyship retreated into languid sleepy dignity towards both her sisters-in-law; and on Monday evening showed herself, for a moment, more *decolletée*, if possible, than before. Mrs. Poynsett feared lest Julius were weak in this matter; but at night she had a visit from him.

"Mother," he said, "it will not happen again. Say no more."

"I am only too thankful."

"What do you think settled it? No less than Lady Tyrrell's admiration."

"What could she have said?"

"I can't make out. Rose was far too indignant to be comprehensible, when she told me on the way home; but there was something about adopting the becoming, and a repetition of—of some insolent praise." And his mother felt his quiver of suppressed wrath. "If Rose had been what that woman took her for, she would have been delighted," he continued; "but—"

"It was horrible to her!" said his mother. "And to you. Yes, I knew it would right itself, and I am glad nothing passed about it between us."

"So am I; she quite separates you from Cecil and Anne, and indeed all her anger is with Lady Tyrrell. She will have it there was malice in inciting her to shock old friends and annoy you—a sort of attempt to sympathize her into opposition."

"Which had a contrary effect upon a generous nature."

"Exactly! She thinks nothing too bad for that woman, and declares she is a serpent."

"That's dear Rosamond's anger; but I imagine that when I occur to Camilla's mind, it is as the obstructive old hag, who once stood in her way; and so, without any formed designs, whatever she says of me is coloured by that view."

"Quite possible; and I am afraid the sister is just such another. She seems quite to belong to Mrs. Duncombe's set. I sat next her at dinner, and tried to talk to her, but she would only listen to that young Strangeways."

"Strangeways! I wonder if that is Susan Lorimer's son?"

"Probably, for his Christian name is Lorimer."

"I knew her rather well as a girl. She was old Lord Lorimer's youngest daughter, and we used to walk in the Square gardens together; but I did not see much of her after I married; and after a good while, she married a man who had made a great fortune by mining. I wonder what her son is like?"

"He must be the man, for he is said to be the millionaire of the regiment. Just the match that Lady Tyrrell would like."

"Ah! that's well," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"From your point of view," said Julius, smiling.

"If he will only speak out before it has had time to go deep with Frank!"

CHAPTER IX
Cold Heart

At that very moment the two sisters in question were driving home in the opposite corners of the carriage in the dark.

"Really, Lenore," was Lady Tyrrell saying, "you are a very impracticable girl."

There was a little low laugh in answer.

"What blast has come and frozen you up into ice?" the elder sister added caressingly; but as she felt for Eleonora's hand in the dark, she obtained nothing but the cold handle of a fan. "That's just it!" she said, laughing; "hard ivory, instead of flesh and blood."

"I can't help it!" was the answer.

"But why not? I'm sure you had admiration enough to turn any girl's head."

No answer.

Lady Tyrrell renewed her address still more tenderly—"Lenore, darling, it is quite needful that you should understand your position."

"I am afraid I understand it only too well," came in a smothered voice.

"It may be very painful, but it ought to be made clear before you how you stand. You know that my father was ruined—there's no word for it but ruined."

"Yes."

"He had to give up the property to the creditors, and live on an allowance."

"I know that."

"And, of course, I can't bear speaking of it; but the house is really let to me. I have taken it as I might any other house to let."

"Yes," again assented Eleonora.

"And do you know why?"

"You said it was for the sake of the old home and my father!" said the girl, with a bitter emphasis on the *said.*

"So it was! It was to give you the chance of redeeming it, and keeping it in the family. It is to be sold, you know, as soon as you are of age, and can give your consent. I can't buy it. Mine is only a jointure, a life income, and you know that you might as well think of Mary buying Golconda; but you—you—with such beauty as yours—might easily make a connection that would save it."

There was only a choked sound.

"I know you feel the situation painfully, after having been mistress so long."

"Camilla, you *know* it is not that!"

"Ah, my dear, I can see farther than you avow. You can't marry till you are twenty-one, you know; but you might be very soon engaged, and then we should see our way. It only depends on yourself. Plenty of means, and no land to tie him down, ready to purchase and to settle down. It would be the very thing; and I see you are a thoroughly sensible girl, Lena."

"Indeed! I am not even sensible enough to know who is to be this purchaser."

"Come, Lena, don't be affected. Why! he was the only poor creature you were moderately gracious to."

"I! what do you mean?"

Lady Tyrrell laughed again.

"Oh!" in a tone of relief, "I can explain all that to you. All the Strangeways family were at Rockpier the winter before you came, and I made great friends with Margaret Strangeways, the eldest sister. I wanted very much to hear about her, for she has had a great deal of illness and trouble, and I had not ventured to write to her."

"Oh! was that the girl young Debenham gave up because her mother worried him so incessantly, and who went into a Sisterhood?"

"It was she who broke it off. She found he had been forced into it by his family, and was really attached elsewhere. I never knew the rights of it till I saw the brother to-night."

"Very praiseworthy family confidence!"

"Camilla, you know I object to that tone."

"So do most young ladies, my dear—at least by word."

"And once for all, you need have no fancies about Mr. Lorimer Strangeways. I am civil to him, of course, for Margaret's sake; and Lady Susan was very kind to me; but if there were nothing else against him, he is entirely out of the question, for I know he runs horses and bets on them."

"So does everybody, more or less."

"And you! you, Camilla, after what the turf has cost us, can wish me to encourage a man connected with it."

"My dear Lena, I know you had a great shock, which made the more impression because you were such a child; but you might almost as well forswear riding, as men who have run a few horses, or staked a few thousands. Every young man of fortune has done so in his turn, just by way of experiment—as a social duty as often as not."

"Let them," said Eleonora, "as long as I have nothing to do with them."

"What was that pretty French novel—*Sybille*, was it?—where the child wanted to ride on nothing but swans? You will be like her, and have to condescend to ordinary mortals."

"She did not. She died. And, Camilla, I would far rather die than marry a betting man."

"A betting man, who regularly went in for it! You little goose, to think that I would ask you to do that! As you say we have had enough of that! But to renounce every man who has set foot on a course, or staked a pair of gloves, is to renounce nine out of ten of the world one lives in."

"I do renounce them. Camilla, remember that my mind is made up for ever, and that nothing shall ever induce me to marry a man who meddles with the evils of races."

"Meddles with the evils? I understand, my dear Lena."

"A man who makes a bet," repeated Eleonora.

"We shall see," was her ladyship's light answer, in contrast to the grave tones; "no rules are without exceptions, and I only ask for *one*."

"I shall make none."

"I confess I thought you were coming to your senses; you have been acting so wisely and sensibly ever since you came home, about that young Frank Charnock."

Lady Tyrrell heard a little rustle, but could not see that it was the clasping of two hands over a throbbing heart. "I am very glad you are reasonable enough to keep him at a distance. Poor boy, it was all very well to be friendly with him when we met him in a place like Rockpier, and you were both children; but you are quite right not to let it go on. It would be mere madness."

"For him, yes," murmured the girl.

"And even more so for you. Why, if he had any property worth speaking of, it would be a wretched thing to marry into that family! I am sure I pity those three poor girls! Miles's wife looks perfectly miserable, poor thing, and the other two can't conceal the state of things. She is just the sort of woman who cannot endure a daughter-in-law."

"I thought I heard Lady Rosamond talking very affectionately of her."

"Very excitedly, as one who felt it her duty to stand up for her out-of-doors, whatever she may do indoors. I saw victory in those plump white shoulders, which must have cost a battle; but whatever Lady Rosamond gains, will make it all the worse for the others. No, Eleonora, I have known Mrs. Poynsett's rancour for many years, and I would wish no one a worse lot than to be her son's *fiancée*, except to be his wife."

"She did not seem to object to these marriages."

"The sons took her by surprise. Besides, Raymond's was the very *parti* mothers seek out for their sons. Depend upon it, she sent him off with her blessing to court the unexceptionable cousin with the family property. Poor Raymond, he is a dutiful son, and he has done the deed; but, if I am not much mistaken the little lady is made of something neither mother nor son is prepared for, and he has not love enough to tame her with."

"That may be seen at a glance. He can't help it, poor fellow; he would have had it if he could, like anything else that is proper."

There was a moment's silence; then the exclamation, "Just look there!"

One of the hats was nodding on the box in a perilous manner.

"It is *only* James," said Lady Tyrrell; "as long as it is not the coachman, it matters the less. There's no danger."

"You will not keep him, though!"

"I don't know. He is much the best looking and handiest of the men; and your page, Master Joshua, is no great acquisition yet."

"I wish you would not call him mine; I wish you would send him back to his grandmother. I can't bear his being among those men."

"Very complimentary to my household! They are not a bit worse than the company he came from! You don't believe in rural simplicity, eh?"

"I believe that taking that boy from his home makes us responsible."

"And do I hinder you from catechizing him to your heart's content? or sending him to the school of design?"

Again Eleonora was silent. Perhaps the balancing of the footman's head occupied her mind. At any rate, no more was said till the sisters had reached their home. Then, at the last moment, when there was no time left for a reply, Eleonora cleared and steadied her voice, and said, "Camilla, understand two things for truth's sake. First, I mean what I say. Nothing shall ever induce me to marry a man who bets. Next, I never have forgotten Frank Charnock for one moment. If I have been cold and distant to him, it is because I will not draw him near me to be cruelly scorned and disappointed!"

"I don't mind the why, if the effect is the same," were Lady Tyrrell's last words, as the door opened.

Eleonora's little white feet sped quickly up the steps, and with a hasty good night, she sped across the hall, but paused at the door. "Papa must not be disappointed," she whispered to herself, and dashed her hand over her eyes; and at the moment the lock turned, and a gray head appeared, with a mighty odour of smoke. "Ah! I thought my little Lena would not pass me by! Have you had a pleasant party, my dear? Was young Strangeways there?"

She had nestled in his arms, and hoped to avoid notice by keeping her head bent against him, as she hastily responded to his questions; but he detected something.

"Eh? Camilla been lecturing? Is that it? You've not been crying, little one? It is all right, you know! You and I were jolly enough at Rockpier; but it was time we were taken in hand, or you would have grown into a regular little nun, among all those black coats."

"I wish I were."

"Nonsense! You don't know life! You'll tell another story one of these days; and hark childie, when you've married, and saved the old place, you'll keep the old room for the old man, and we'll have our own way again."

She could but kiss him, and hide her agitation in caresses, ere hurrying up the stairs she reached her own rooms, a single bed-chamber opening into a more spacious sitting-room, now partially lighted by the candles on the toilette-table within.

She flung herself down on a chair beyond the line of light, and panted out half aloud, "Oh! I am in the toils! Oh for help! Oh for advice! Oh! if I knew the right! Am I unfair? am I cold and

hard and proud? Is she telling me true? No, I know she is not—not the whole truth, and I don't know what is left out, or what is false! And I'm as bad—making them think I give in and discard Frank! Oh! is that my pride—or that it is too bad to encourage him now I know more? He'll soon scorn me, and leave off—whatever he ever thought of me. She has taken me from all my friends—and she will take him away! No one is left me but papa; and though she can't hurt his love, she has got his confidence away, and made him join against me! But that one thing I'll never, never do!"

She started up, and opened a locked purple photograph-album, with 'In Memoriam' inscribed on it—her hands trembling so that she could hardly turn the key. She turned to the likeness of a young man—a painful likeness of a handsome face, where the hard verities of sun-painting had refused to veil the haggard trace of early dissipation, though the eyes had still the fascinating smile that had made her brother Tom, with his flashes of fitful good-nature, the idol of his little sister's girlhood. The deadly shock of his sudden death had been her first sorrow; and those ghastly whispers which she had heard from the servants in the nursery, and had never forgotten, because of the hushed and mysterious manner, had but lately started into full force and meaning, on the tongues of the plain-spoken poor.

She gazed, and thought of the wrecked life that might have been so rich in joys; nay, her tenderness for her father could not hide from her how unlike his old age was from that of Mr. Bowater, or of any men who had done their service to their generation in all noble exertion. He had always indeed been her darling, her charge; but she had never known what it was to look up to him with the fervent belief and enthusiasm she had seen in other girls. To have him amused, loitering from reading-room to parade or billiard-room, had been all that she aspired to, and only lately had she unwillingly awakened to the sense how and why this was—and why the family were aliens in their ancestral home.

"And Camilla, who knew all—knew, and lived through the full force of the blight and misery—would persuade me that it all means nothing, and is a mere amusing trifle! Trifle, indeed, that breaks hearts and leads to despair and self-destruction and dishonour! No, no, no—nothing shall lead me to a gamester! though Frank may be lost to me! He will be! he will be! We deserve that he should be! I deserve it—if family sins fall on individuals—I deserve it! It is better for him—better—better. And yet, can he forget—any more than I—that sunny day—? Oh! was she luring him on false pretences? What shall I do? How will it be? Where is my counsellor? Emily, Emily, why did you die?"

Emily's portrait—calm, sweet, wasted, with grave trustful eyes—was in the next page. The lonely girl turned to it, and gazed, and drank in the soothing influence of the countenance that had never failed to reply with motherly aid and counsel. It rested the throbbing heart; and presently, with hands clasped and head bent, Eleonora Vivian knelt in the little light closet she had fitted as an oratory, and there poured out her perplexities and sorrows.

CHAPTER X
A Truant

Since for your pleasure you came here,
You shall go back for mine.

—COWPER

"How like Dunstone you have made this room!" said Raymond, entering his wife's apartment with a compliment that he knew would be appreciated.

Cecil turned round from her piano, to smile and say, "I wish papa could see it."

"I hope he will next spring; but he will hardly bring Mrs. Charnock home this winter. I am afraid you are a good deal alone here, Cecil. Is there no one you would like to ask?"

"The Venns," suggested Cecil; "only we do not like them to leave home when we are away; but perhaps they would come."

Raymond could not look as if the proposal were a very pleasing one. "Have you no young-lady friends?" he asked.

"We never thought it expedient to have intimacies in the neighbourhood," said Cecil.

"Well, we shall have Jenny Bowater here in a week or two."

"I thought she was your mother's friend."

"So she is. She is quite young enough to be yours."

"I do not see anything remarkable about her."

"No, I suppose there is not; but she is a very sensible superior person."

"Indeed! In that commonplace family."

"Poor Jenny has had an episode that removes her from the commonplace. Did you ever hear of poor Archie Douglas?"

"Was not he a good-for-nothing relation of your mother?"

"Not that exactly. He was the son of a good-for-nothing, I grant, whom a favourite cousin had unfortunately married, but he was an excellent fellow himself; and when his father died, she had Mrs. Douglas to live in that cottage by the Rectory, and sent the boy to school with us; then she got him into Proudfoot's office—the solicitor at Backsworth, agent for everybody's estates hereabouts. Well, there arose an attachment between him and Jenny; the Bowaters did not much like it, of course; but they are kind-hearted and good-natured, and gave consent, provided Archie got on in his profession. It was just at the time when poor Tom Vivian was exercising a great deal more influence than was good among the young men in the neighbourhood; and George Proudfoot was rather a joke for imitating him in every respect—from the colour of his dog-cart to the curl of his dog's tail. I remember his laying a wager, and winning it too, that if he rode a donkey with his face to the tail, Proudfoot would do the same; but then, Vivian did everything with a grace and originality."

"Like his sister."

"And doubly dangerous. Every one liked him, and we were all more together than was prudent. At last, two thousand pounds of my mother's money, which was passing through the Proudfoots' hands, disappeared; and at the same time poor Archie fled. No one who knew him could have any reasonable doubt that he did but bear the blame of some one else's guilt, most likely that of George Proudfoot; but he died a year or two back without a word, and no proof has ever been found; and alas! the week after Archie sailed, we saw his name in the list of sufferers in a vessel that was burnt. His mother happily had died before all this, but there were plenty to grieve bitterly for him; and

poor Jenny has been the more like one of ourselves in consequence. He had left a note for Jenny, and she always trusted him; and we all of us believe that he was innocent."

"I can't think how a person can go about as usual, or ever get over such a thing as that."

"Perhaps she hasn't," said Raymond, with a little colour on his brown cheek. "But I'm afraid I can't make those visits with you to-day. I am wanted to see the plans for the new town-hall at Wil'sbro'. Will you pick me up there?"

"There would be sure to be a dreadful long waiting, so I will luncheon at Sirenwood instead; Lady Tyrrell asked me to come over any day."

"Alone? I think you had better wait for me."

"I can take Frank."

"I should prefer a regular invitation to us both."

"She did not mean to make a formal affair."

"Forms are a protection, and I do not wish for an intimacy there, especially on Frank's account."

"It would be an excellent match for Frank."

"Indeed, no; the estate is terribly involved, and there are three daughters; besides which, the family would despise a younger son. An attachment could only lead to unhappiness now, besides the positive harm of unsettling him. His tutor tells me that as it is he is very uneasy about his examination —his mind is evidently preoccupied. No, no, Cecil, don't make the intercourse unnecessarily close. The Vivians have not behaved well to my mother, and it is not desirable to begin a renewal. But you shall not lose your ride, Cecil; I'll ask one of the boys to go with you to the Beeches, and perhaps I shall meet you there."

"He talks of my lonely life," said Cecil, to herself, "and yet he wants to keep me from the only person who really understands me, all for some rancorous old prejudice of Mrs. Poynsett's. It is very hard. There's no one in the house to make a friend of—Rosamond, a mere garrison belle; and Anne, *bornée* and half a dissenter; and as soon as I try to make a friend, I am tyrannized over, and this Miss Bowater thrust on me."

She was pounding these sentiments into a sonata with great energy, when her door re-opened, and Raymond again appeared. "I am looking for two books of Mudie's. Do you know where they can be? I can't make up the number."

"They are here," said Cecil; "Lanfrey's *Vie de Napoleon*; but I have not finished them."

"The box should have gone ten days ago. My mother has nothing to read, and has been waiting all this time for the next part of *Middlemarch*," said Raymond.

"She said there was no hurry," murmured Cecil.

"No doubt she did; but we must not take advantage of her consideration. Reading is her one great resource, and we must so contrive that your studies shall not interfere with it."

He waited for some word of regret, but none came; and he was obliged to add, "I must deprive you of the books for the present, for she must not be kept waiting any longer; but I will see about getting them for you in some other way. I must take the box to the station in the dog-cart." He went without a word from her. It was an entirely new light to her that her self-improvement could possibly be otherwise than the first object with everyone. At home, father and mother told one another complacently what Cecil was reading, and never dreamt of obstructing the virtuous action. Were her studies to be sacrificed to an old woman's taste for novels?

Cecil had that pertinacity of nature that is stimulated to resistance by opposition; and she thought of the Egyptian campaign, and her desire to understand the siege of Acre. Then she recollected that Miss Vivian had spoken of reading the book, and this decided her. "I'll go to Sirenwood, look at it, and order it. No one can expect me to submit to have no friends abroad nor books at home. Besides, it is all some foolish old family feud; and what a noble thing it will be for my resolution and independence to force the two parties to heal the breach, and bridge it over by giving Miss Vivian to Frank."

In this mood she rang the bell, and ordered her horses; not however till she had reason to believe the dog-cart on the way down the avenue. As she came down in her habit, she was met by Frank, returning from his tutor.

"Have I made a mistake, Cecil! I thought we were to go out together this afternoon!"

"Yes; but Raymond was wanted at Willansborough, and I am going to lunch at Sirenwood. I want to borrow a book."

"Oh, very well, I'll come, if you don't mind. Sir Harry asked me to drop in and look at his dogs."

This was irresistible; and Frank decided on riding the groom's horse, and leaving him to conduct Anne to the rendezvous in the afternoon—for Charlie had been at Sandhurst for the last week—running in first to impart the change of scheme to her, as she was performing her daily task of reading to his mother.

He did so thus: "I say, Anne, Cecil wants to go to Sirenwood first to get a book, so Lee will bring you to meet us at the Beeches at 2.30."

"Are you going to luncheon at Sirenwood?" asked Mrs. Poynsett.

"Yes; Cecil wants to go," said the dutiful younger brother.

"I wish you would ask Cecil to come in. Raymond put himself into such a state of mind at finding me reading Madame de Sévigné, that I am afraid he carried off her books summarily, though I told him I was glad of a little space for my old favourites."

Cecil was, however, mounted by the time Frank came out, and they cantered away together, reaching the portico of Sirenwood in about twenty minutes.

Cecil had never been in the house before, having only left her card, though she had often met the sisters. She found herself in a carpeted hall, like a supplementary sitting-room, where two gentlemen had been leaning over the wide hearth. One, a handsome benignant-looking old man, with a ruddy face and abundant white whiskers, came forward with a hearty greeting. "Ah! young Mrs. Poynsett! Delighted to see you!—Frank Charnock, you're come in good time; we are just going down to see the puppies before luncheon. Only I'll take Mrs. Poynsett to the ladies first. Duncombe, you don't know Mrs. Raymond Poynsett—one must not say senior bride, but the senior's bride. Is that right?"

"No papa," said a bright voice from the stairs, "you haven't it at all right; Mrs. Charnock Poynsett, if you please—isn't it?"

"I believe so," replied Cecil. "Charnock always seems my right name."

"And you have all the right to retain it that Mrs. Poynsett had to keep hers," said Lady Tyrrell, as they went up-stairs to her bedroom. "How is she?"

"As usual, thank you; always on the sofa."

"But managing everything from it?"

"Oh, yes."

"Never was there such a set of devoted sons, models for the neighbourhood."

Cecil felt a sense of something chiming in with her sources of vexation, but she only answered, "They are passionately fond of her."

"Talk of despotism! Commend me to an invalid! Ah! how delightfully you contrive to keep your hair in order! I am always scolding Lenore for coming in dishevelled, and you look so fresh and compact! Here is my sanctum. You'll find Mrs. Duncombe there. She drove over in the drag with her husband on their way to Backsworth. I am so glad you came, there is so much to talk over."

"If our gentlemen will give us time," said Mrs. Duncombe; "but I am afraid your senator will not be as much absorbed in the dogs as my captain."

"I did not come with my husband," said Cecil; "he is gone to Willansborough to meet the architect."

"Ah, about the new buildings. I do hope and trust the opportunity will not be wasted, and that the drainage will be provided for."

"You are longing to have a voice there," said Lady Tyrrell, laughing.

"I am. It is pre-eminently a woman's question, and this is a great opportunity. I shall talk to every one. Little Pettitt, the hair-dresser, has some ground there, and he is the most intelligent of the tradesmen. I gave him one of those excellent little hand-bills, put forth by the Social Science Committee, on sanitary arrangements. I thought of asking you to join us in ordering some down, and never letting a woman leave our work-room without one."

"You couldn't do better, I am sure," said Lady Tyrrell; "only, what's the use of preaching to the poor creatures to live in good houses, when their landlords won't build them, and they must live somewhere?"

"Make them coerce the landlords," said Mrs. Duncombe; "that's the only way. Upheave the masses from beneath."

"But that's an earthquake," said Cecil.

"Earthquakes are sometimes wholesome."

"But the process is not so agreeable that we had not rather avert it," said Lady Tyrrell.

"All ours at Dunstone are model cottages," said Cecil; "it is my father's great hobby."

"Squires' hobbies are generally like the silver trough the lady gave her sow," said Mrs. Duncombe; "they come before the poor are prepared, and with a spice of the autocrat."

"Come, I won't have you shock Mrs. Charnock Poynsett," said Lady Tyrrell. "You illogical woman! The poor are to demand better houses, and the squires are not to build them!"

"The poor are to be fitly housed, as a matter of right, and from their own sense of self-respect," returned Mrs. Duncombe; "not a few favourites, who will endure dictation, picked out for the model cottage. It is the hobby system against which I protest."

"Without quite knowing what was conveyed by it in this instance?" said Lady Tyrrell. "I am sure there is nothing I wish more than that we had any power of improvement of the cottages here; but influence is our only weapon."

"By the bye, Mrs. Poynsett," continued Mrs. Duncombe, "will you give a hint to Mrs. Miles Charnock that it will never do to preach to the women at the working-room? I don't mean holding forth," she added, seeing Cecil's look of amazement; "but improving the occasion, talking piously, giving tracts, and so forth."

"I thought you gave sanitary tracts!" said Lady Tyrrell.

"That is quite different."

"I doubt whether the women would see the distinction. A little book *is* a tract to them."

"I would abstain rather than let our work get a goody reputation for indoctrinating sectarianism. It would be all up with us; we might as well keep a charity school."

"I don't think the women dislike it," said Cecil.

"Most likely they think it the correct thing, the grain which they must swallow with our benefits; but for that very reason it injures the whole tone, and prevents them learning independence. Put it in that light; I know you can."

"I don't think Anne would understand," said Cecil, somewhat flattered.

"I doubt whether there are three women in the neighbourhood who would," said Lady Tyrrell.

"People always think charity—how I hate the word!—a means of forcing their own tenets down the throats of the poor," said Mrs. Duncombe. "And certainly this neighbourhood is as narrow as any I ever saw. Nobody but you and—shall I say the present company?—has any ideas. I wonder how they will receive Clio Tallboys and her husband?"

"Ah! you have not heard about them," said Lady Tyrrell. "Most delightful people, whom Mrs. Duncombe met on the Righi. He is a Cambridge professor."

"Taillebois—I don't remember the name," said Cecil, "and we know a great many Cambridge men. We went to a Commencement there."

"Oh, not Cambridge on the Cam! the American Cambridge," said Mrs. Duncombe. "He is a quiet, inoffensive man, great on political economy; but his wife is the character. Wonderfully brilliant and original, and such a lecturer!"

"Ladies' lectures *would* startle the natives," said Lady Tyrrell.

"Besides, the town-hall is lacking," said Mrs. Duncombe; "but when the Tallboys come we might arrange a succession of *soirées*, where she might gather her audience."

"But where?" said Lady Tyrrell. "It would be great fun, and you might reckon on me; but where else? Mrs. Charnock Poynsett has to think of *la belle mère*."

"She has given up the management of all matters of society to me," said Cecil with dignity; "you may reckon on me."

"No hope of the Bowaters, of course," said Mrs. Duncombe.

"Miss Bowater is coming to stay with us," volunteered Cecil.

"To be near that unlucky Life Guardsman *manqué*," said Mrs. Duncombe.

"Come, I'll not have honest Herbert abused," said the other lady. "He is the only one of the Bowaters who has any go in him."

"More's the pity, if he can't use it. Is his sister coming to help the Reverend Julius to drill him?"

"On Mrs. Poynsett's account too, I fancy," said Lady Tyrrell; "Jenny Bowater is her amateur companion. Indeed, I believe it was no slight disappointment that her sons' appreciation did not quite reach the pitch of the mother's."

"Indeed!" asked Mrs. Duncombe; "I thought there had been a foolish affair with poor young Douglas."

"*Celà n'empêche pas*. By the bye, have you finished Fleurange?"

"Oh, you are quite welcome to it. It is quite as goody as an English tale in one volume."

This opened the way to Cecil's desire to borrow Lanfrey, not concealing the reason why; and she was gratified by the full sympathy of both ladies, who invited her in self-defence to join in their subscription to Rolandi, to which she eagerly agreed, and would have paid her subscription at once if there had not been a term to be finished off first.

The gong summoned them to luncheon, and likewise brought down Miss Vivian, who shook hands rather stiffly, and wore a cold, grave manner that did not sit badly on her handsome classical features. The countenance was very fine, but of the style to which early youth is less favourable than a more mature development; and she was less universally admired than was her sister. Her dress was a dark maroon merino, hanging in simple, long, straight folds, and there was as little distortion in her coiffure as the most moderate compliance with fashion permitted; and this, with a high-bred, distinguished deportment, gave an air almost of stern severity. This deepened rather than relaxed at the greeting from Frank—who, poor fellow! had an uncontrollably wistful eager look in his face, a sort of shy entreaty, and was under an incapacity of keeping up a conversation with anybody else, while trying to catch the least word of hers.

She, however, seemed to have more eyes and ears for her father than for any one else, and he evidently viewed her as the darling and treasure of his life. His first question, after performing the duties of a host, was, "Well, my little Lenore, what have you been doing?"

"The old story, papa," raising her clear, sweet voice to reach his rather deaf ears.

"Got on with your drawing?—The child is competing with a club, you must know."

"Not exactly, papa: it is only a little society that was set on foot at Rockpier to help us to improve ourselves."

"What is your subject this month?" Frank asked.

"A branch of blackberries," she answered briefly.

"Ah!" said Lady Tyrrell, "I saw your pupil bringing in a delicious festoon—all black and red fruit and crimson and purple leaves. He is really a boy of taste; I think he will do you credit."

"The new Joshua Reynolds," said Frank, glad of an excuse to turn towards Eleonora. "Rosamond mentioned her discovery."

"You might have seen him just now figuring as Buttons," said Lady Tyrrell. "Degradation of art, is it not? But it was the only way to save it. Lenore is teaching him; and if his talent prove worth it we may do something with him. Any way, the produce of native genius will be grand material for the bazaar."

"Card-board prettinesses!" said Mrs. Duncombe; "you spoil him with them; but that you'll do any way—make him fit for nothing but a flunkey."

"Unappreciated zeal!" said Lady Tyrrell, glancing at her sister, who flushed a little, and looked the more grave.

"Eh, Lenore," said her father, "wasn't it to please you that Camilla made me take your pet to make havoc of my glasses?"

"You meant it so, dear papa," said Eleonora, calling up a smile that satisfied the old gentleman. "It was very kind in you."

Fresh subjects were started, and on all the talk was lively and pleasant, and fascinated Cecil, not from any reminiscence of Dunstone—for indeed nothing could be more unlike the tone that prevailed there: but because it was so different from that of Compton Poynsett, drifting on so unrestrainedly, and touching so lightly on all topics.

By the close of the meal, rain had set in, evidently for the afternoon. Frank offered to ride home, and send the carriage for Cecil; but the Duncombes proposed to take her and drop her at home; and to this she consented, rather to Frank's dismay, as he thought of their coach appearing at his mother's door.

Lady Tyrrell took her up to resume her hat; and on the way, moved by distaste to her double surname, and drawn on by a fresh access of intimacy, she begged to be called Cecil—a privilege of which she had been chary even in her maiden days; but the caressing manner had won her heart, and spirit of opposition to the discouragement at home did the rest.

The request was reciprocated with that pensive look which was so touching. "I used to be Camilla to all the neighbourhood, and here I find myself—miles'—no, leagues further off—banished to Siberia."

"How unjust and unkind!" cried Cecil.

"My dear, you have yet to learn the gentle uncharitableness of prejudice. It is the prevailing notion that my married life was a career of dissipation. Ah! if they only knew!"

"The drag is round," said Mrs. Duncombe's voice at the door, in all its decisive abruptness, making both start.

"Just ready," called Lady Tyrrell; adding, in a lower tone, "Ah! she is startling, but she is genuine! And one must take new friends when the old are chilly. She is the only one—"

Cecil's kiss was more hearty than any she had given at Compton, and she descended; but just as she came to the door, and was only delaying while Frank and Captain Duncombe were discussing the merits of the four horses, the Compton carriage appeared in the approach, and Raymond's head within. Lady Tyrrell looked at Cecil, and saw it was safe to make a little gesture with the white skin of her fair brow, expressing unutterable things.

Mrs. Duncombe lost no time in asking if any steps were being taken for improving the drainage; to which Raymond replied, "No, that was not the business in hand. This was the architecture of the town-hall."

"Splendour of municipality above, and fever festering below," said Mrs. Duncombe.

"Wilsborough is not unhealthy," said Raymond.

She laughed ironically.

"The corporation have been told that they have an opportunity," said Raymond; "but it takes long to prepare people's minds to believe in the expedience of such measures. If Whitlock could

be elected mayor there would be some chance, but I am afraid they are sure to take Truelove; and as things are at Wilsborough, we must move all at once or not at all. Individual attempts would do more harm than good."

"Ah! you fear for your seat!" said the plain-spoken lady.

Raymond only chose to answer by a laugh, and would not pursue the subject so treated. He was politeness itself to all; but he withstood Lady Tyrrell's earnest entreaties to come in and see some Florentine photographs, growing stiffer and graver each moment, while his wife waxed more wrathful at the treatment which she knew was wounding her friend, and began almost to glory in having incurred his displeasure herself. Indeed, this feeling caused the exchange of another kiss between the ladies before Sir Harry handed Cecil into the carriage, and Raymond took the yellow paper books that were held out to her.

Looking at the title as they drove off, he said quietly, "I did not mean to deprive you, Cecil; I had ordered Lanfrey from Bennet for you."

She was somewhat abashed, but was excited enough to answer, "Thank you. I am going to join Lady Tyrrell and Mrs. Duncombe in a subscription to Rolandi's."

He started, and after a pause of a few moments said gently, "Are you sure that Mr. and Mrs. Charnock would like to trust your choice of foreign books to Mrs. Duncombe?"

Taking no notice of the point of this question, she replied, "If it is an object to exchange books at home faster than I can read them properly, I must look for a supply elsewhere."

"You had better subscribe alone," he replied, still without manifest provocation.

"That would be uncivil now."

"I take that upon myself."

Wherewith there came a silence; while Cecil swelled as she thought of the prejudice against her friend, and Raymond revolved all he had ever heard about creatures he knew so little as women, to enable him to guess how to deal with this one. How reprove so as not to make it worse? Ought not his silent displeasure to suffice? And in such musings the carriage reached home.

It had been an untoward day. He had been striving hard against the stream at Willansborough. The drainage was not only scouted as an absurd, unreasonable, and expensive fancy, but the architect whom he had recommended, in the hope that he would insist on ground-work which might bring on the improvement, had been rejected in favour of a kinsman of Mr. Briggs, the out-going mayor, a youth of the lower walk of the profession—not the scholar and gentleman he had desired, for the tradesman intellect fancied such a person would be expensive and unmanageable.

Twin plans for church and town-hall had been produced, which to Raymond's taste savoured of the gimcrack style, but which infinitely delighted all the corporation; and where he was the only cultivated gentleman, except the timid Vicar, his reasonings were all in vain. The plan was accepted for the town-hall, and the specifications were ordered to be made out for competition, and a rate decided on. The church was to wait for subscription and bazaar; the drains, for reason in Wil'sbro', or for the hope of the mayoralty of Mr. Whitlock, a very intelligent and superior linendraper.

CHAPTER XI
Rosamond's Apologue

Pray, sir, do you laugh at me?

—Title of Old Caricature

Was Cecil's allegiance to Dunstone, or was it to the heiress of Dunstone? Tests of allegiance consist in very small matters, and it is not always easy to see the turning-point. Now Cecil had always stood on a pinnacle at Dunstone, and she had found neither its claims nor her own recognized at Compton. One kind of allegiance would have remained on the level, and retained the same standard, whether accepted or not. Another would climb on any pinnacle that any one would erect for the purpose, and become alienated from whatever interfered with such eminence.

So as nobody seemed so willing to own Cecil's claims to county supremacy as Lady Tyrrell, her bias was all towards Sirenwood; and whereas such practices as prevailed at Dunstone evidently were viewed as obsolete and narrow by these new friends, Cecil was willing to prove herself superior to them, and was far more irritated than convinced when her husband appealed to her former habits.

The separation of the welfare of body and soul had never occurred to the beneficence of Dunstone, and it cost Cecil a qualm to accept it; but she could not be a goody in the eyes of Sirenwood; and besides, she was reading some contemporary literature, which made it plain that any religious instruction was a most unjustifiable interference with the great law, "Am I my brother's keeper?" and so, when she met Anne with a handful of texts neatly written out in printing letters, she administered her warning.

Cecil and Anne had become allies to a certain extent, chiefly through their joint disapproval of Rosamond, not to say of Julius; and the order was so amazing that Anne did not at first take it in; and when she understood that all mention of religion was forbidden, she said, "I do not think I ought to yield in this."

"Surely," said Cecil, "there is no connection between piety and cutting out."

"I don't know," said Anne; "but it does not seem to me to be right to go on with a work where my Master's Name is forbidden."

"Religion ought never to be obtruded," said Cecil.

"The Word ought to flavour everything, in season or out of season," said Anne, thoughtfully.

"Oh! that's impossible. It's your narrow view. If you thrust preaching into everything, we can never work together."

"Oh, then," said Anne, quickly, "I must give it up!" And she turned away with a rapid step, to carry her texts back to her room.

"Anne!" called Cecil, "I did not mean *that*!"

Anne paused for a moment, looked over the baluster, and repeated firmly, "No, Cecil; it would be denying Christ to work where His Name is forbidden."

Perhaps there was something in the elevation and the carved rail that gave the idea of a pulpit, for Cecil felt as if she was being preached at, and turned her back, indignant and vexed at what she had by no means intended to incur—the loss of such a useful assistant as she found in Anne.

"Such nonsense!" she said to herself, as she crossed the hall alone, there meeting with Rosamond, equipped for the village. "Is not Anne going to-day?" she said, as she saw the pony-carriage at the door.

"No. It is so vexatious. She is so determined upon preaching to the women, that I have been obliged to put a stop to it."

"Indeed! I should not have thought it of poor Anne; but no one can tell what those semi-dissenters think right."

"When she declared she ought to do it in season or out of season, what was one to do?" said Cecil.

"I thought that was for clergymen," said Rosamond, hitting the right nail on the head in her ignorance, as so often happened.

"She sees no difference," said Cecil. "Shall I drive you down?" she added graciously, according to the fashion of uniting with one sister-in-law against the other; and Rosamond not only accepted, but asked to be taken on to Willansborough, to buy a birthday present for her brother Terry, get stamps for an Indian letter, and perform a dozen more commissions that seemed to arise in her mind with the opportunity. Her two brothers were to spend the Christmas holidays with her, and she was in high spirits, and so communicative about them that she hardly observed how little interest Cecil took in Terry's achievements.

"Who is that," she presently asked, "with those red-haired children? It looked like Miss Vivian's figure."

"I believe it was. Julius and I often see her walking about the lanes; but she passes like—like a fire-flaught, whatever that is—just bows, and hardly ever speaks."

"She is a strange girl," said Cecil. "Lady Tyrrell says she cannot draw her into any of her interests, but she will go her own way."

"Like poor Anne?"

"No, not out of mere moping and want of intellect, like Anne. But Lady Tyrrell says she feels for her; she was brought a great deal too forward, and was made quite mistress of the house at Rockpier, being her father's darling and all, and now it is trying to her, though it is quite wholesome, to be in her proper place. It is a pity she is so bitter over it, and flies off her own way."

"That boy!" said Rosamond; "I hope she does something for his good."

"She teaches him, I believe; but there's another instance of her strange ways. She was absolutely vexed when Lady Tyrrell took him into the house, though he was her *protégé*, only because it was not done in *her* way. It is a great trial to Camilla."

"I could fancy a reason for that," said Rosamond. "Julius does not like the tone of the household at all." But she added hastily, "Who could those children be? They did not look *quite* like poor children."

"Ah! she is always taking up with some odd person in her own away," said Cecil. "But here we are. Will you drive on to the hotel, or get out here?"

When, at the end of two hours, the sisters-in-law met at the work-room, and Rosamond had taken a survey of the row of needle-women, coming up one by one to give their work, be paid and dismissed, there was a look of weariness and vexation on Cecil's face. She had found it less easy to keep order and hinder gossip, and had hardly known how to answer when that kind lady, Mrs. Miles Charnock, had been asked after; but she would have scorned to allow that she had missed her assistant, and only politely asked how Rosamond had sped.

"Oh! excellently. People were so well advised as to be out, so I paid off all my calls."

"You did not return your calls without Julius?"

"There's nothing he hates so much. I would not have dragged him with me on any account."

"I think it is due to one's self."

"Ah! but then I don't care what is due to myself. I saw a friend of yours, Cecil."

"Who?"

"Mrs. Duncombe," said Rosamond. "I went to Pettitt's—the little perfumer, you know, that Julius did so much for at the fire; and there she was, leaning on the counter, haranguing him confidentially upon setting an example with sanatory measures."

"Sanitary," corrected Cecil; "*sanitas* is health, *sano* to cure. People never know the difference."

"Certainly I don't," said Rosamond. "It must be microscopic!"

"Only it shows the difference between culture and the reverse," said Cecil.

"Well, you know, I'm the reverse," said Rosamond, leaning sleepily back, and becoming silent; but Cecil was too anxious for intelligence to let her rest, and asked on what Mrs. Duncombe was saying.

"I am not quite sure—she was stirring up his public spirit, I think, about the drainage; and they were both of them deploring the slackness and insensibility of the corporation, and canvassing for Mr. Whitlock, as I believe. It struck me as a funny subject for a lady, but I believe she does not stick at trifles."

"No real work can be carried out by those who do," said Cecil.

"Oh!" added Rosamond, "I met Mrs. and Miss Bowater, and they desired me to say that Jenny can't come till the dinner-party on the 20th, and then they will leave her."

"How cool to send a message instead of writing!"

"Oh! she has always been like one of themselves, like a sister to them all."

"I can't bear that sort of people."

"What sort?"

"Who worm themselves in."

"Miss Bowater could have no occasion for worming. They must be quite on equal terms."

"At any rate, she was only engaged to their poor relation."

"What poor relation? Tell me! Who told you?"

"Raymond. It was a young attorney—a kind of cousin of the Poynsett side, named Douglas."

"What? There's a cross in the churchyard to Elizabeth Douglas, daughter of Francis Poynsett, and wife of James Douglas, and at the bottom another inscription to Archibald Douglas, her son, lost in the *Hippolyta*."

"Yes, that must be the man. He was flying from England, having been suspected of some embezzlement."

"Indeed! And was Jenny engaged to him? Julius told me that Mrs. Douglas had been his mother's dearest friend, and that this Archie had been brought up with them, but he did not say any more."

"Perhaps he did not like having had a cousin in an attorney's office. I am sure I had no notion of such a thing."

Rosamond laughed till she was exhausted at the notion of Julius's sharing the fastidious objections she heard in Cecil's voice; and then, struck by the sadness of the story, she cried, "And that makes them all so fond of Miss Bowater. Poor girl, what must she not have gone through! And yet how cheerful she does look!"

"People say," proceeded Cecil, unable to resist the impulse to acquire a partaker in her half-jealous aversion, "that it was a great disappointment that Mrs. Poynsett could not make her sons like her as much as she did herself."

"Oh!" cried Rosamond, "how little peace we should have if we always heeded what people say!"

"People that know," persisted Cecil.

"Not very wise or very kind people to say so," quoth Rosamond; "though, by the bye, the intended sting is happily lost, considering that it lies among five."

"Why should you assume a sting?"

"Because I see you are stung, and want to sting me," said Rosamond, in so merry a tone that the earnestness was disguised.

"I! I'm not stung! What Mrs. Poynsett or Miss Bowater may have schemed is nothing to me," said Cecil, with all her childish dignity.

"People talk of Irish imagination," said Rosamond in her lazy meditative tone.

"Well?" demanded Cecil, sharply.

"Only it is not *my* Irish imagination that has devised this dreadful picture of the artful Jenny and Mrs. Poynsett spinning their toils to entrap the whole five brothers. Come, Cecil, take my advice and put it out of your head. Suppose it were true, small blame to Mrs. Poynsett."

"What do you mean?" said Cecil, in a voice of hurt dignity.

"I may mean myself." And Rosamond's peal of merry laughter was most amazing and inexplicable to her companion, who was not sure that she was not presuming to laugh at her.

There was a silence, broken at last by Rosamond. "Cecil, I have been tumbled about the world a good deal more than you have, and I never found that one got any good by disregarding the warnings of the natives. There's an immense deal in the cat and the cock."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.